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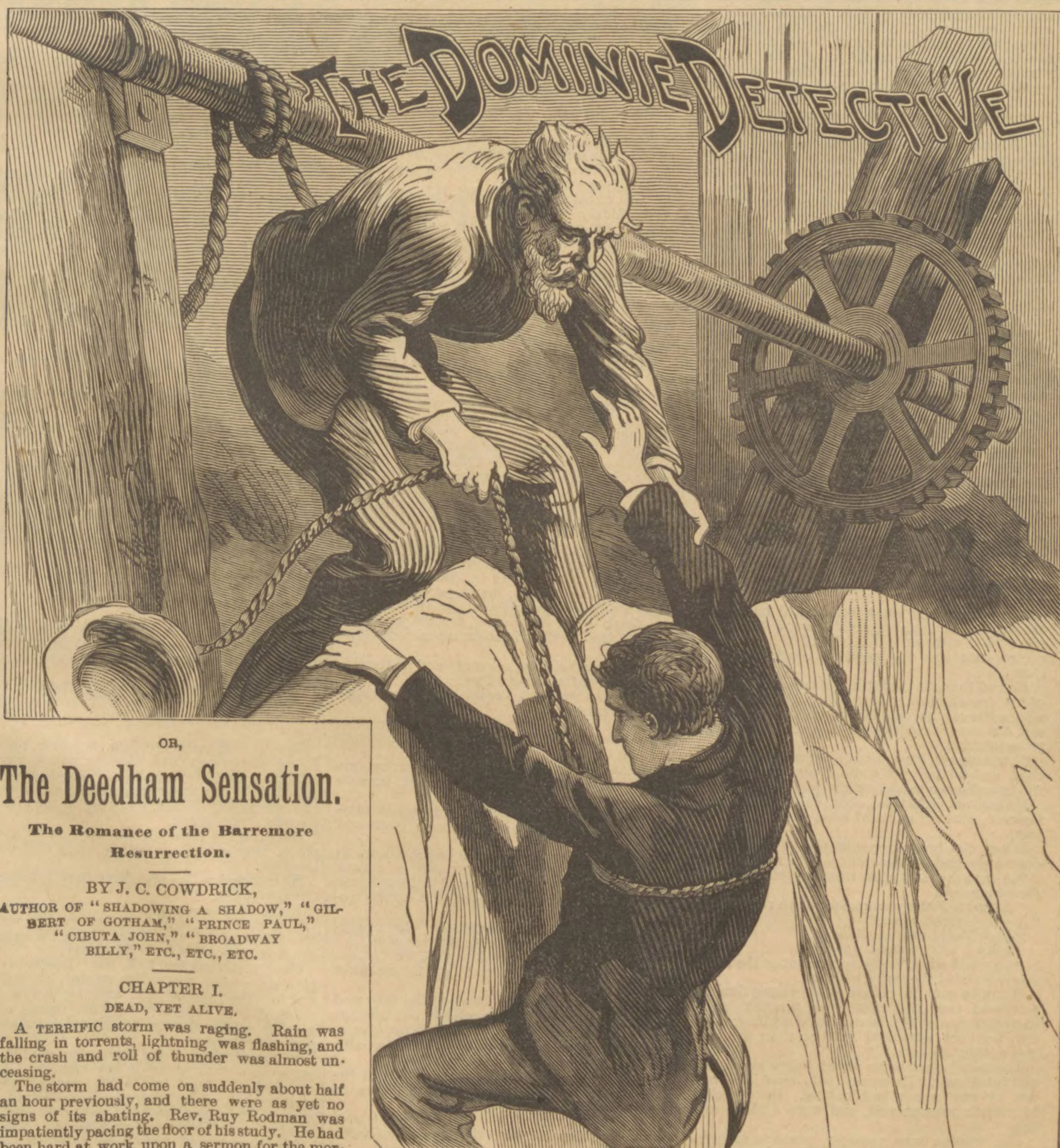
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OR,

The Deedham Sensation.

The Romance of the Barremore
Resurrection.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "SHADOWING A SHADOW," "GIL-
BERT OF GOTHAM," "PRINCE PAUL,"
"CIBUTA JOHN," "BROADWAY
BILLY," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DEAD, YET ALIVE.

A TERRIFIC storm was raging. Rain was falling in torrents, lightning was flashing, and the crash and roll of thunder was almost unceasing.

The storm had come on suddenly about half an hour previously, and there were as yet no signs of its abating. Rev. Ruy Rodman was impatiently pacing the floor of his study. He had been hard at work upon a sermon for the morrow, it being a Saturday night; but had been making slow progress, and now the fury of the

THE TOP WAS FINALLY REACHED AND THE OLD RECLUSE WAS THERE TO HELP HIM
OVER THE EDGE OF THE SHAFT. THE CLERGYMAN WAS SAVED!

storm made it impossible for him to concentrate his thoughts upon his work.

He was a young man, being not more than thirty, and a decidedly handsome one. His hair and eyes were black, his features were clear cut and regular, and his neatly trimmed mustache and whiskers became him well. He was tall, finely formed, and possessed the figure of an athlete. Now, however, his hair was in a state of disorder, owing to his habit of plowing his fingers through it when at work, and he was clad in the gown and slippers of the study.

Ruy Rodman was unmarried, but that was no fault of any number of eligible and desirable young ladies of his congregation. The choicest flower of his flock was to be had for the plucking, but, although he had been their shepherd for two years, no particular lamb of the fold could lay claim to his preference. His manner was the same to all, old and young, rich and poor; and he was greatly liked. He occupied the parsonage belonging to the charge upon which he was stationed, and employed a housekeeper, an elderly woman named Anastasia Budd.

Anastasia was a pious soul, always solicitous about the young pastor, and peculiarly deaf. No matter what was said to her, or under what circumstances, it had to be repeated. She would wait until the speaker was entirely done, and then invariably place her hand behind her ear and respectfully interrogate—"Eigh?" and the whole would have to be said over again. Upon reiteration she would understand perfectly. This habit was annoying to strangers, and it had been particularly so to Ruy Rodman; but he soon found means of ameliorating the vexation. Whenever he had anything of length to say to the housekeeper, he would utter just a few words and then come to a sudden stop. She would immediately put in her "Eigh?" Then he would go on and make known what he desired to communicate, and would not have to repeat again.

"What a terrible night!" the young clergyman murmured, as he paced to and fro. "Nothing short of a call to a death-bed could induce me to go out in such a storm. By the same reasoning, it is not likely that anything of less importance could compel any one to come for me.

"I guess my preaching to-morrow will have to be extempore. This has been a busy week. Besides a host of other demands upon my time, I have attended four funerals, and—"

A sudden and sharp ring at the door-bell! He stopped in his walk, wondering greatly who the caller could be and what his errand.

He moved to the door, opened it slightly and listened.

He heard his housekeeper advance to the street door and open it, and heard some persons step hurriedly in out of the rain.

"Is the clergyman in?" a man's voice asked.

"Eigh?" interrogated Anastasia.

"I say is the clergyman in?" in a louder tone

"Yes, sir, he is in," was the answer.

"Please tell him that we desire him to perform the marriage service for us without delay," the man directed.

"Eigh?"

"Tell him that we want him to marry us right away," the man repeated, in a tone that expressed considerable impatience.

"All right, sir; wait right here, please."

Saying that, the housekeeper started up the stairs.

The young clergyman had turned back into the room on hearing the man's errand stated, his mind filled with surprise. Of all things unexpected, this was the greatest, considering the storm.

He had thought that it might be some member of his church, seeking temporary shelter, or possibly some one to call him to visit a dying person, but never that it could be a couple desiring to be married.

Throwing off his gown, he hurriedly put on a coat, and taking up his ritual, was ready when the housekeeper tapped at the door.

He had not closed the door, and made no pretense of not having heard what was wanted of him.

When the housekeeper tapped he opened the door wide, and she saw that he was ready.

"A man and a woman want to get married," she announced.

"All right," the young clergyman responded; "I will go right down."

"Eigh?" said the housekeeper.

"I say I will go right down."

As he said this, Ruy stepped out of the room and descended the stairs.

When he saw the couple who awaited him, he perceived that they were wet through, as a thorough drenching is usually described; and they had not advanced further than the mat just within the door.

The man looked to be about thirty years old, and intelligent. He wore a full beard, and was not by any means bad-looking. He was clad in a dark business suit, and wore a black soft hat.

The woman was younger, perhaps twenty-two. She was good-looking, but very pale. Her clothing had been, before the rain, rather stylish, but it was now in a sorry plight.

At the first sight of her face the young clergyman felt sure that he had seen her somewhere before, but he could not bring to mind the time or place.

He was about to speak as he neared the bottom of the stairs, but the man forestalled him, saying:

"I realize, sir, that this is a most unseemly time for the purpose that brings us here, and that we are in a most unrepresentable condition; but we are the unwilling victims of circumstances and the elements. We have come quite a distance, and the shower overtook us, and as we must catch the ten-o'clock train without fail, we had to push on. We would like to be married as quickly as possible.

This was said hurriedly, but in a natural and unexcited tone, and the young clergyman had no grounds for supposing that the statement was otherwise than true.

"You have brought no witness with you," he observed.

"No," was the response; "cannot this woman act as witness?" indicating the housekeeper, who had followed the clergyman down.

"Yes, she can act, in the absence of any other, and—"

"Very well," the man interrupted, "please proceed. We will stand right here, for owing to our being so wet you would not care to have us come any further."

"You will have to sign your names—"

"A small stand can be brought here," the stranger interrupted again. "I will pay you for your trouble, sir."

"Very well."

There was a light table in the adjoining room, which was quickly brought, and in a drawer were pen and ink and the necessary blank forms.

The clergyman drew up a chair and proceeded to fill out the form required.

"Your name?" he asked the man.

"Herold Keenah," was the answer.

"Age?"

"Thirty-two."

"And your name?" turning to the woman.

"Huldah Barremore," was the response, given in a slightly nervous voice.

At the mention of the name the clergyman looked quickly up. He had heard that name recently, but where? He could not remember, and after a second's pause, he wrote it down.

"What is your age?" he next asked.

"Twenty-three."

The other questions were asked and answered, and then the persons were required to sign the paper.

At this point the housekeeper thoughtfully offered her apron for them to dry their hands on, and when they had done so, they quickly wrote their names in the places the clergyman indicated.

The signature of the housekeeper was then required, and as she took the pen the young clergyman noticed that her hand trembled. Glancing at her face, he saw that she was pale, too. This, however, he attributed to the solemnity of the moment, heightened as it was by the terrific fury of the elements without.

When her signature had been appended, the clergyman opened his ritual and began the service.

"I require and charge both of you," he read, "that if either of you know any impediment why you may not lawfully be joined together, you do now confess it; for be ye well assured, that so many as are coupled together otherwise than God's word doth allow, are not joined together of God, neither is their matrimony lawful."

This was read slowly, solemnly and distinctly, and an impressive pause followed.

The silence was not broken, and the clergyman continued:

"Herold Keenah, wilt thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife?" and so on, according to the usual form.

The man's response was firm and strong, but that of the woman, when it came her turn to reply, was rather faint.

The ceremony proceeded, and in a few minutes the couple were pronounced man and wife.

It took the clergyman but a few moments to fill out a certificate. This he rolled in a sheet of oiled paper which he happened to have in the drawer of the table, and handed it to the woman.

As he delivered the certificate, the newly-made husband put a gold coin into his hand.

"We are greatly obliged to you, sir," he observed, "and now we must go on, for we must not miss the train."

As he spoke he laid his hand on the door and opened it, and the woman glided out into the howling fury of the storm, and before the clergyman could respond the man had spoken a hasty "good-night," and followed her.

Ruy Rodman stood and gazed blankly at the door for fully a quarter of a minute before he moved or spoke.

"Where," he presently asked himself, "have I seen that face and heard that name before?"

"Eigh?"

The housekeeper's sudden interrogation aroused him.

"Mrs. Budd," he asked, "where have I seen that woman before?"

The housekeeper was still pale, and it was in something of a frightened tone that she responded:

"Why, Mr. Rodman, did you not preach her funeral sermon this very afternoon? I thought I might be mistaken, but now that you say you have seen her before, I am sure I am not. It is the same face I saw in the coffin in the church!"

CHAPTER II.

AN APPALLING DEMAND.

RUY RODMAN felt a chill pass over him, as though an icy finger had touched him, and knew that his own face had suddenly paled.

What the housekeeper had said was true. He had that afternoon preached the funeral sermon of Huldah Barremore, and it was of the face in the coffin that this other woman's face reminded him!

It was to say the least, a very strange coincidence.

In trying to recall where he had seen the woman and where he had heard the name, he was looking further back than that same day. Had his thoughts turned to the funeral of that afternoon, then he would have remembered immediately; but that event was so near that it was overlooked in the mental search for a clew, and then, too, it was the very last direction in which he naturally would look.

He did not believe for a moment that the two persons were one and the same, for that, of course, was impossible. He had seen the lid of the coffin closed over the dead woman's face, had followed the coffin to the grave, and had seen it lowered to its final resting-place.

No, he quickly decided, it was simply a strange coincidence.

"Why, Mrs. Budd," he observed, after a little pause, "you do not imagine that this woman was the same one you saw in the coffin, do you?"

"Eigh?" Anastasia blandly questioned.

For the moment the young clergyman had forgotten her peculiar deafness.

"Do you really think this was the dead woman returned to life?" he changed the question.

"I could not help having that thought," the housekeeper answered, "but of course it can't have been. The moment I saw her face I thought of the dead woman whose funeral sermon you preached this afternoon, but I did not think anything strange of that, for we occasionally see faces that are strikingly alike; but when she gave her name, and it was the same as the one on the coffin-plate, then, I must confess, I was frightened."

"Well, it was—"

A sudden break and pause.

"Eigh?"

"I was about to remark that it was only a striking coincidence. As you have observed, we now and again see faces that are quite similar in general appearance, and we know that many persons in the world may bear the same name; but where these two peculiarities are found together, as in this instance, we cannot but call the coincidence remarkable. For instance, there may be several Anastasia Budds in the world, and if one is remarkably like you in appearance, and you should meet her, you would consider it quite wonderful."

"I certainly should," the housekeeper confessed.

"Well, this—"

"Eigh?"

"I was about to say that this is a parallel case. We know that it cannot be anything more. I will replace this table in the room for you, Mrs. Budd."

"Oh, no, do not do it; Mr. Rodman," the housekeeper exclaimed; "I will do it myself in a moment, but I must wipe up this water first."

Her protest came too late, however, for the young clergyman had already picked up the table and was carrying it away, so she gave her attention to the water that had run from the two strangers' clothes, mopping it up with her already soiled apron.

When he had returned the table to its proper place, Ruy went back to his study and closed the door.

He resumed at once his march to and fro across the apartment.

His mind was not easy.

The church of which he was pastor was on the outskirts of the little city of Deedham, about twenty miles from New York.

Should the reader look for "Deedham" on his map, within the radius named, he will not find it. For reasons that must be obvious, the name of this city, as well as the names of the persons whose doings we chronicle, must be given fictitiously.

While within the city limits, the church was at the same time almost in the country. It was of good size, and had a big and prosperous membership. The parsonage adjoined the church, and was a neat and pretty cottage containing several large and well lighted rooms.

The church and parsonage faced upon the main thoroughfare of the city, a highway that, further out, merged into a turnpike. Here it

was paved and lighted, and its sidewalks were properly laid with flags.

The property belonging to the church consisted of about two acres and a half. The parsonage stood at the right of the church, and on a corner made by the junction of the main thoroughfare and a less important cross-street. On the left of the church, and on around and behind it and the parsonage, lay a cemetery.

The rear boundary of this cemetery was marked by a high stone wall. Beyond that wall the green fields stretched away, with houses here and there, most of them new.

In front of the church, parsonage and cemetery, on the opposite side of the street, were some vacant lots; but from that point on, the houses were more plenty, and merged soon into the city proper.

At the other extreme of the little city was the railroad station, fully a mile from the church.

"If they really had to catch the train," the young clergyman mused, as he paced the floor, "of course their haste is easily understood; and as the storm could not do them any more damage than it had done already, there is an excuse for their going on in it. Still, I cannot help thinking that there is something about them that is not altogether right.

"First is the fact of their coming in such a storm. Still, that was naturally explained. They had come quite a distance, the man said, and the storm came upon them after they had set out. That is reasonable, and I could easily dismiss the whole matter from my mind were it not for the—as I have termed it—remarkable coincidence.

"This afternoon I preached the funeral sermon of Huldah Barremore, and saw her buried. To-night Huldah Barremore comes here to be married. That the two persons should bear the same name is not remarkable; but, to all appearances, these two Huldah Barremores were one and the same person. I cannot understand it.

"It is true I never saw either of them but the once, and both were strangers to me. Could I see their faces together, I might discover that they bear far less resemblance to each other than I imagine. I must take to myself the explanation I made to Mrs. Budd.

"Well, the event has passed into history, now, and the couple are man and wife, whoever they may be. If there is anything wrong the blame is theirs, not mine. I will dismiss the matter from my thoughts."

This was easier said than done, and when, half an hour later, Mrs. Budd tapped at the door to announce that she was about to retire, the young clergyman was still pacing the floor and the subject was still uppermost in his mind.

He responded to the housekeeper's good-night, and threw himself upon the chair in front of his desk.

"Try as I will," he muttered, "I cannot get these events out of my mind. I do not know why they should impress me so. There was no connection whatever between the funeral and the wedding. It is simply absurd to imagine that there can be.

"The fact that I knew none of the parties amounts to nothing. In a city of this size, there are thousands of persons whom I have never seen.

"Thursday night an elderly gentleman called here, announced that his name was Clement Barremore, stated that his daughter was dead and requested me to preach the funeral sermon. His daughter, he said, had expressed a desire to be buried in this cemetery, and he thought it would be proper for the funeral to be held in my church. I told him that I would perform the service, and the hour was set for two o'clock on Saturday.

"At that hour, this afternoon, the funeral party arrived, and everything passed off in just the usual way. There was nothing to mar, and nothing to excite. There were a goodly number of mourners, but none with whom I am acquainted. When the coffin was opened I noted that the corpse was that of a young woman who did not look to be over twenty-two. She had been good-looking in life, and even death had not been able to rob her of all her beauty. It was a face that I had never seen before, and one which I certainly never expect to behold again, but—"

He came to a pause. He had been speaking just audibly to himself, with frequent breaks, as though deliberately paraphrasing. This time the stop was full, and he was silent for some minutes.

"It is remarkable!" he presently exclaimed. "I never expected to see that face again, and of course have not, nor ever will; but I have seen one that was remarkably like it, and that was the face of the woman who came here to-night. And the names of the two persons were— But, I must get this out of my mind. I will tackle my sermon again."

He turned to his unfinished manuscript determinedly, and reading over what he had last written, he took up the pen again and started in anew.

For some minutes it was rather slow, but, presently, he had got over the "snag" that had

caught him before, and fresh thoughts and ideas coming to him, he was soon plunging ahead at full speed.

Once under headway, he hardly looked up, and when his task was finally done and he laid aside the pen, he was surprised to find that it was half-past one o'clock.

The storm had ceased, and everything was quiet.

Pushing back his chair, he got up, and just as he had done so there came a ring at the bell that awoke the echoes of the whole house.

"Who can that be?" the young clergyman interrogated. "It must be something urgent at this hour."

Taking a match, he opened the door and went down-stairs, and when he had lighted the gas in the hall, he demanded:

"Who is there?"

"My name is Kemp," came back the response in a man's voice, "and I live over on Chestnut avenue. My poor old mother is a-dyin', sir, and she would like to have you come over and say somethin' that will sort of help her along. You know what I mean, sir, better'n I can tell it."

The clergyman opened the door and looked at the man. He had the appearance of being an honest laborer.

"All right, my man," he said, "I'll go right along with you."

In a few minutes he was ready, and they set out. They turned down the cross-street that has been mentioned, but before they had got past the cemetery a startling thing happened. The clergyman was suddenly seized from behind by a pair of strong arms, and at the same time the man at his side clapped a pistol to his head and in a harsh voice hissed:

"We don't want to do ye no harm, Dominie, but you have got ter do as we says, or die. We want ye ter show us ther grave of Huldah Barremore!"

CHAPTER III.

MYSTERY UPON MYSTERY.

RUY RODMAN was startled, and not a little frightened.

The surprise was so great and sudden, and the demand so appalling, that for a moment he was bereft of the power of speech.

"What is the meaning of this?" he presently was able to demand.

"We means what we says," was the response.

"We won't stand no foolin', so you had better come right along quiet."

"And it was for this purpose that I was called out?"

"That was our little game, mister."

"Shame on you! It were better that you had dragged me from my house, than to have abused my confidence by so foul a lie."

"We took ther surest way, so as ter have no fuss made over it. But, come; we ain't got no time ter waste, so th' sooner ye show us that grave th' sooner ye kin return to yer house."

The young clergyman saw that he was in a dilemma. He was entirely unarmed, and at the two rascals' mercy.

One of the fellows was masked, and now the darkness prevented him from seeing much of the face of the other, and he realized that from the brief look he had had at the man's face at the door, he would never be able to identify him positively. He knew that he had never seen the man before.

Most startling of all was their strange demand. At such an hour, why did they want to learn the location of the grave of Huldah Barremore? It was that name in particular that lent weirdness to the mysterious affair. First her funeral, then her marriage, and now these men at this unseemly hour demanding to know where her grave was located.

"Why do you want to know where that grave is?" Ruy demanded, in tones as severe as he could command.

"That is our business," was the retort. "All that we want of you is ter go an' p'int it out to us. Now I warn ye that we won't stand no more foolin'."

"And if I refuse to do as you order?"

"Then we'll shoot ye, jest as true as ther gospel ye spout."

The man's tone and manner implied that he fully meant what he said. The young clergyman had no choice but to obey. He was powerless, one of the men holding his arms from behind, and the threatening aspect of the pistol that stared him in the face was well calculated to unnerve the stoutest of hearts.

"Very well, I will show you," he promised.

"And ye won't try ter fool us?"

"I will not deceive you."

"An' ye won't try ter run off if my partner lets go of yer arms? If ye do I will send a bullet huntin' fer ye sooner than ye kin wink."

"We had better tie his arms to make sure," the other fellow spoke up.

"I guess you're right," his companion agreed; "here is some strong string."

"You need not fear to allow me the use of my arms," Ruy assured; "I will not risk a bullet by trying to escape. You have said that I may return to the house as soon as I have complied with your demand."

"We'll tie ye jest ther same," responded the

man behind him, "an' so make doubly sure of ye."

As he said this he proceeded to make the young clergyman's hands fast, the other fellow still holding the pistol at Ruy's head.

"There," the fellow soon announced, "now you are safe enough, and ye kin run if ye want ter."

"At the risk of yer life," the other put in. "Come, now," he added, "we have wasted time enough. You go right ahead through that hole in th' fence there, Dominie, an' strike a bee-line for th' grave we want ter find."

They were near the stone wall at the rear of the cemetery, and as the man gave the order he pointed to a hole that had been made in the high picket fence on the street side.

It was quite dark, there being no other light than that afforded by the stars and the distant street-lamps on the main street, but it was light enough to discern the objects immediately surrounding.

The young clergyman stepped through the hole in the fence, and made his way through the wet grass to the nearest walk, and then along that in the direction of the place where Huldah Barremore had been buried, the men following right at his heels.

When he had gone a little distance he stopped and looked around him in an uncertain way.

At his feet was an open grave, and he had almost stepped into it.

"What's ther matter?" one of the men demanded.

"That is what I am trying to determine," the clergyman answered. "Is this your work, opening this grave?"

"No matter whether it is or not," was the answer; "you go on and show us the one we want to find."

"I believe that this is the one," Ruy declared.

"We don't want no guess-work about it; we must know for sartin'."

"If I had more light I could—"

"But you can't have any more light," was the gruff interruption, "so make sure of it without it."

"Yes, I am sure that this is the grave," the clergyman asserted positively, "for here is the stone I stood on while I read the burial service. This is the one you are looking for."

"Be ye sure beyond any chance of doubt?" the man with the pistol urged.

"Yes, this is positively the grave," the clergyman assured.

"Is that stone th' only proof ye have got?"

"No; I remember that this monument was right at my elbow, and that that iron railing was just on the other side. There can be no mistake. But what has been going on here? Has the body been stolen?"

"We didn't bring ye here ter ask questions, Dominie, so jest don't ask any," he was told and ordered. "Will ye swear p'int blank, now, that this is th' very grave that Huldah Barremore was buried in?"

"I swear not at all," was the response to that.

"I have told you positively that this is the grave. If the coffin is there, why do you not read the name on that plate on the lid?"

"Ther devil! why didn't we think of that? Begyer pardon fer th' cuss-word, Dominie, but it popped out. Git down in there, pardner, an' light a match an' see if any name is on ther stiff-case."

The other man let himself down into the wet and clay-sticky hole, and after a few minutes' delay lighted a match.

The clergyman was standing near enough to look in, and by the light of the match he saw that the lid of the box had been taken off, and that the coffin was exposed to view. He noted also that the head-piece of the coffin had been removed, and that the coffin was empty!

The man pawed away with his hand some dirt that was on the lid of the coffin, and the plate was soon discovered.

"This is ther right hole," he announced; "it is 'Huldah Barremore' on ther plate, as plain as plain kin be."

"That settles it, then," said the other. "Dominie, if we had only thought of lookin' fer that plate, we wouldn't 'a' had ter call you out. We'll be done with ye as soon as we kin fill th' hole up ag'in."

"I would like to know something about this passing strange affair," the young clergyman declared. "Where is the body that was in the coffin when it was put here?"

"You tell us an' we'll tell you," the man who held the pistol made answer.

The other fellow had climbed out of the grave, and now set to work to fill it up.

"Do you mean to say that you don't know?" Ruy demanded.

"Of course we don't know. But, ask no questions, fer they won't be answered. Come, hustle that dirt in there, pardner, fer we have fooled around here too long as it is."

The man who was handling the spade worked away with a will, and in a short time the task was done.

In the mean time the young clergyman had been in a deep study. His thoughts, however, were all in a whirl. The man who had the pis-

tol in hand had to speak twice before he roused him up.

"Come, Dominie!" he exclaimed, "we're goin', an' we'll escort ye back ter th' street, if ye want us to."

"You say you are done with me?" Ruy asked.

"Yes, we're done with ye."

"Then I will go right to the house this rear way."

"All right, lope along then, an' we'll be off in this other direction. We are much 'bliged to ye, an' sorry that we had ter disturb ye, which was owin' ter our own thick-headedness. Good-night, Dominie!"

Without waiting for any response, the two men hurried away toward the hole in the fence, and as soon as the darkness had shut them out of sight the clergyman bent his steps in the direction of the parsonage.

The men had gone off with out untying his hands, so it would be necessary for him to call up the housekeeper in order to get in.

When he reflected that she was a remarkably sound sleeper, however, and that he would probably have to knock loud and long before he could awaken her, he hit upon another plan.

It was his intention to go to the nearest police station and report what had taken place, and he would save time by going just as he was.

Passing around the rear of the church, then, instead of going to the rear door of the house, as he had at first intended, he ascended the side steps of the portico, and so made his way to the street.

He set out immediately at rapid pace.

In due time he was at the police-station, and knocking at the door with his foot, was soon admitted.

He happened to be acquainted with the officer who admitted him, and also with the sergeant in charge, and as soon as they had freed his hands he told his story.

It was listened to with excited interest, and the sergeant immediately sent out an alarm for the arrest of the two men if they could be found, stating as about the only clew that could be given, that they were well smeared with clay.

There being nothing further that he could do in the matter, Ruy Rodman returned home and retired to bed, but not to sleep. The events of the past twelve hours came crowding upon his mind, and sleep was impossible.

What was the mystery of Huldah Barremore? Had he indeed performed the marriage service for the same person whose funeral sermon he had preached only a few hours previously? Impossible! and yet, *was* it impossible? What of the two men? Who and what were they? What interest had they in the young woman?

Question upon question, and no satisfying answer to any of them.

CHAPTER IV.

"I AM A MURDERER!"

It was 2 A. M. of the same night of which the previous chapters treat.

A light was burning in the basement of Dr. Mervyn Laird's house, as could be seen from the street in spite of the fact that the windows were heavily curtained.

Within was the doctor, pacing the floor with a quick, nervous step, his face and manner showing that he was in a state of the greatest mental distress, and every few minutes he glanced at his watch.

He was a single man, thirty-two years of age. His widowed mother was his housekeeper. He was of average height, slightly fleshy, and good-looking. His face was clean-shaven, his hair was light and his eyes a very deep blue. His father had been a doctor, and Mervyn had stepped into his place at his death. He enjoyed a good practice, and was widely known and greatly liked.

"Will they never come?" he muttered impatiently, looking at his watch again. "He should have been here an hour ago. What can be keeping him? Heavens! but this suspense is terrible."

He had crossed the room but a few times more when there came a rap at a door in the rear.

"At last!" the doctor exclaimed, and he hastened out into the hall and on to the rear to open the door.

"Is that you, Abner?" he asked before drawing the bolt.

"Yes," was the answer, "it's me."

The doctor opened the door and a man stepped quickly in.

As soon as the door had been secured again, they went forward to the room where the light was burning, which was, by the way, the doctor's office.

The man who had just come in was a rather rough-looking character, and about forty or forty-five years old.

"Well," the doctor asked, as soon as they were in the room, "is everything all right? and is the body at the house?"

"Neither one nor the other," was the rather gloomy response. "Everything is all wrong, and the body ain't at the house."

"Good heavens!" Dr. Laird exclaimed, "what is this you say?"

His face had suddenly paled, and the exclamations were uttered almost fiercely.

"It is just what I did say," the man assured.

"But, what happened?" the doctor urged. "What is it that has gone wrong? Did you get caught in the act?"

"Did Abner Sharpin ever get caught? No, it wasn't that, but when we opened the grave the body was gone."

"My God! it is impossible! Gone? Do you say the body was gone?"

The doctor's distress and agitation were painful to witness. He was white to the very lips, and his eyes were dilated as though with the greatest horror.

"It was gone, slick and clean. There was nothing in the coffin but some sand and mud that had dropped in when the body was taken out."

"You must have opened the wrong grave," the doctor cried. "Come, we must go back there at once, at all risks. Another hour and it may be forever too late. I was a fool that I did not go with you in the first place, no matter what the danger was. Oh! this is dreadful, horrible! How did you make such a blunder, Abner?"

"Just hold on there, doctor, and give me a chance to talk a little," the other man said. "I haven't made any mistake. What I am telling you is just the straight facts. I wasn't fool enough to come away from there without being sure about the matter, though I did make a fool of myself in another way. Let's set down, and I'll tell you all about it. No good ter think about goin' back there, fer it ain't no use."

"Yes, but *are* you sure?" the doctor urged. "This is a matter of life and death, Abner Sharpin, and if there is one grain of doubt—"

"And I tell you there ain't," the man insisted. "We opened the right grave, for the coffin had the name of Huldah Barremore on the plate on the lid, but the body was not there."

Dr. Laird'slaw sunk down upon a chair with a groan.

"Tell me your story," he said, "and tell it at length. Do not omit a single point of it."

"All right," the man agreed, as he, too, sat down, "and I'll begin at the very beginning of the affair."

"Do so."

"I have known you, Mervyn Laird'slaw, ever since you was a little chap in knee-breeches. You never knowed much about me, though, till you was in the graduatin' class in the Deedham Medical College. There you learned that it was Abner Sharpin who could provide the best cadavers at the shortest notice. These are trade secrets, which outsiders have no business to know, but which we can talk about among ourselves."

"After you left the college, of course you hadn't much use for me in that special line, though you would pass a joke with me now and then, as we happened to meet, about old times, and it was something of a surprise to me when, yesterday, you came to me and told me that you wanted me to do a job of that kind. I told you that I was in the way of such work yet, and was still willing to take in an occasional ten dollars for a good, healthy cadaver; and then you knocked the wind clean out of me by saying that you would give me a hundred dollars, all in good hard cash, if I would secure a certain body for you. Naturally, I agreed, and told you to name your subject."

"You went ahead, then, and told me that Huldah Barremore was dead, and that it was her body you wanted. You impressed upon me the importance of the case. You stated it as your belief that she was not dead, or at any rate you thought there was a possible doubt, and you wanted to make an examination which her father would not allow. The price you offered was enough to make me do my best, though, without anything else."

"Well, I got a trusty man to help me—"

"You didn't let him know anything about the importance of the case, or that it was for me you were to get the body, did you?" the doctor interrupted.

"No, of course not. Besides, he is a stranger here, though I have known him for years."

"Good enough. Go on with your story."

"I got him to help me, and about half-past twelve we reached the cemetery and went in. We found some pickets off the fence near the wall, but did not think anything strange of that, for they will get off *occasionally*. We went to the grave, and it was easy enough to find. We opened it. That took time, of course, for the ground was awful wet and mussy. At last we got down to the box, though, and on opening that I discovered that something was wrong. There was sand and mud in on the coffin. The head of the coffin was loose, too. I took it off, and—the coffin was empty."

"Maybe you can imagine how I felt, and maybe you can't. There was that hundred dollars gone slick and clean, and so was the subject you wanted to git so bad. I didn't know what to do. My pardner said that maybe we had opened the wrong grave. I begun to have a doubt about it myself. But, how was we to be sure? There wasn't much time to fool away. And now I'll tell ye how it was that I made a

fool of myself, as I mentioned. I never once thought to look and see if there was a plate on the coffin."

"You just now told me that you *did* look at the plate on the coffin," said the doctor.

"Yes, I know, but that was afterward. Hear me out. There was a light burning in the parsonage, and the thought struck me to make the Dominie come out and show me the right grave. You see I was willing to take big risks for that hundred. I mentioned it to my pardner, and he agreed to it. He said he'd go and get him, as he was a stranger, and off he went. He called the Dominie up, told him that his mother was dying and wanted him to come and see her, and the Dominie was ready in no time. When they came along by the cemetery I nabbed him from behind, and my pardner put a pistol to his head, and we made him do as we ordered."

"That was a big risk."

"I know it was, but I knowed the case was important, and so was that hundred. Well, the Dominie took us to the right grave, the same one we had opened, and said he was sure that it was the one. To prove it, he told us to look at the name on the coffin. I felt like kicking myself then for not thinking of that before. We looked, and sure enough there was the name."

"But the body was gone?"

"Yes, gone slick and clean."

"Great heavens! what can have become of it?"

"Somebody got there ahead of me, that's what's the matter."

"It must be so. Oh! this is horrible, horrible! Do you suppose the clergyman recognized you?"

"Not a bit of it. We both changed our voices, and talked in all the broad slang and coarse ways we could think of; and besides that, I had on a mask."

"I am glad of that, for I would not have this matter leak out for a thousand dollars. See to it that you mention it to no one."

"You can trust me for that."

"Have you anything more to tell?"

"No, that's about all. The body was gone, and there was no doubt about that, and so as soon as we had filled up the grave we got away from there, and as soon as I had changed my clothes I came right here."

"And what about the clergyman?"

"We left him to go to his house the best way he could, with his hands tied. I tell you this matter must be kept mighty mum, for I have no doubt he'll tell the police as soon as morning comes, and it won't do for me to be suspected."

"You are right. It might get you into serious trouble. If anything of the sort should happen, though, don't mention my name. Do you promise this?"

"I do, and you know that Abner Sharpin is a man of his word."

"Very well; and as I believe you have done the best and all you could, I will not let your night's work be altogether in vain. Here is fifty dollars."

"D'ye mean it?"

"I do; take it. I have something else that I want you to do, and this will pay you."

"What is it?"

"You know every other man in the city who follows your line of night-time business?"

"Yes, I guess I do."

"And you know of every place in this city where such wares can be disposed of, too?"

"Yes, sure."

"Well, I want you to play detective for me. I want you to find out who dug that body up, and what became of it. Can you do it?"

"I can try, at any rate."

"Well, do so, and if you can learn the truth of the matter for me I will give you the other half of the hundred."

Abner Sharpin went away; and the doctor resumed his march to and fro across the room. If possible, he seemed more troubled now than he had been before.

"Gone!" he muttered half aloud, "the body was gone! My God! what can have become of it? And I—Oh! horrors!—I am a murderer!"

CHAPTER V.

REHEARSING A BOLD SCHEME.

DR. LAIRD'SLAW pressed his hands to his head as though he feared he would go mad.

Great and terrible was his agitation, whatever the secret that caused it.

Taking his own words as the explanation, there was cause sufficient; but it could not be true that he was a murderer.

What! he, the young, well-liked and prosperous doctor a murderer? Never! He must be mad indeed.

But, what is this he mutters?

"A murderer! Great heavens! is it possible that there is the stain of human blood on my soul? Yes, yes, it is only too true, for I have taken the life of the woman I loved more than I love my own life."

A light step in the hall and a hand on the door-knob caused him to pause in his walk and look up.

The door opened and an elderly woman entered.

She was clad in a loose gown and slippers.

"Mother, what are you doing up at this hour?" the doctor asked, kindly.

At sight of his pale face her own grew white, and she demanded:

"Why, what is the matter, Mervyn?" are you ill?"

"I am not very well," he answered, "and I have something on my mind. It is nothing, however, mother, so go back to bed and do not feel anxious concerning me."

"But, why do you not retire? Have you not been in bed yet?"

"No, not yet. I may have a call at any moment. I have a desperate case on hand."

"It must be, indeed, to keep you up like this and cause you to be so pale. I thought I heard voices, and got up. Finding that you were not in your room, I came down."

"Well, please go back to bed again, mother, for there is no reason why you should be broken of your rest."

"Very well, my son, since you assure me that everything is all right."

"Yes, everything is right, mother."

The mother went out and closed the door, and the young doctor resumed his nervous pacing to and fro.

"Her son! She loves me, but could she know the truth she would despise me. Oh! why did I ever take the desperate risk! This will drive me mad. Oh! Huldah, my love! gone forever, and by my hand."

He sunk into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

For some minutes he neither moved nor spoke—hardly thought.

When he looked up his face had grown haggard in appearance.

"Why did I ever take the frightful risk?" he meditated. "Why was I so mad? Where can that loved form be? Who was it that robbed the grave? Oh! it is maddening! What a fool I was!"

Again he rose and paced the floor.

"I thought that I could never bear it to see her the wife of Herold Keenan, but I had no idea of the horror of this. What have I done? Oh! what have I done?"

His hands were tight clinched, his expression was wild, and his breath seemed to come in bated gasps and pants.

"I know that I have said that I had rather see her dead than see her the wife of Herold Keenan, but that she should be dead indeed, and by my hand—Oh! the awful horror of the thought!"

"I loved Huldah Barremore with an honest but fierce and desperate passion. I had never loved before, and it is certain that I shall never love again. I had the approval of her father, but her love in return I could not win. Would that I had been able to do so!"

"My rival was Herold Keenan, a contemptible rascal, gambler and—I could almost say thief and unprincipled villain generally? She loved him as madly, seemingly, as I loved her, and my suit was altogether hopeless. Her father was altogether against Keenan, had forbade his entering his house, and used all his influence in my favor; but all to no purpose."

"Clement Barremore is rich, and he even went so far as to threaten to disown Huldah if she did not give up her mad love for the man he so disliked. Rather, he declared, would he see her dead at his feet than the wife of such a scoundrel. But his threats had no effect. On her part, Huldah vowed that she would marry Keenan in spite of all opposition."

"I know, and Clement Barremore knows, that Herold Keenan is no fit match for any pure girl, no matter who she be. Knowing this, my desire was to save her from him, even though I might never be able to win her for myself. Her father's desire and determination were that she should marry me. He reasoned, commanded, implored and threatened, by turns, but nothing was of any avail."

"Last Sunday she was taken ill, and Mr. Barremore sent for me. I saw that she was suffering from an attack of nervous prostration, and prescribed accordingly. On the following day I learned by the merest chance, no need to repeat myself how, that it had been arranged that she should elope with Herold Keenan on that very Monday night. Loving her as I did, I was desperate. I had the matter in my own hands. I could give her strength to carry out her design, or I could make her too ill to leave her bed. I did not hesitate long. I did the latter."

"I did not mention to her father the information I had got hold of, and of course did not inform him of what I had done. On the other hand I put a serious face on the matter, and told him that his daughter's life was in danger. Already I had in my mind the terrible scheme which I finally was foolish enough to attempt to carry out. Oh! would that I had not done so!"

"On the following day, Tuesday, she was much worse, so much so that I asked Mr. Barremore whom I should call in for consultation. He named Doctor Rippley. At the mention of his name I thought that my work would be exposed, but it was not. We held a lengthy consultation, the result of which was that I suc-

ceeded in blinding the old doctor completely, and in converting him to the views of the case which I set forth. I do not feel like boasting of this; far from it; but the fact remains."

"On Wednesday she was much worse, and a third doctor was called. Having Doctor Rippley converted, our combined arguments soon convinced Doctor Woodcroft, and our report went forth that the young, handsome and talented Miss Barremore was dying. Would to God that they had discovered my secret, and unmasked my desperate work then and there! But, they did not, and now—now the blood of Huldah Barremore is upon my head!"

"Unfortunately for me, alas! I have made an especial study of suspended animation. Hundreds of experiments have I made with mandragora, nitrate of amyl, woorali, chloral hydrate, cyanogens, and all the rest of the infernal and diabolical list, and at last I made a discovery which, as yet, I have not made known. I found that certain proportions of two of the well-known substances which suspend the vital process, combined with a third which is not so well known, is capable of producing suspended animation for an indefinite time. With it I have experimented repeatedly. I have administered it to animals, and digging them up after they had been buried one, two, three and even up to seven days, have restored them again to active life."

"Ah! medicine is a grand study! but terrible is the situation to which knowledge of it has brought me. Verily, a little learning is a dangerous thing."

"This new drug, or rather combination of drugs, produces perfect suspended animation, in which the heart is working regularly, but at very low tension, supplying just sufficient blood to sustain molecular life, but no more. I administer the antidote, and, presto! the heart suddenly enlarges in volume and reanimates the whole organism by the force of its renewed strength. I care not how long this stage of passivity lasts, I can bring the animal or person back to life provided the fluids have not become pectous."

"But, pshaw! am I delivering a lecture to a college class? No, but I am going over the ground that has led to this terrible affair. It was this knowledge of a terrible agent and its antidote that has placed me where I am."

"Loving Huldah Barremore as I did, a terrible temptation was thrown in my way, and I embraced it and the opportunity. To have made her well, would have been to lose her and see her throw herself away upon that worthless rascal. Anything rather than that. The scheme that had been framing in my mind finally took definite shape, and I resolved to carry it out."

"I would administer some of this drug to the woman I loved. She would die—as everybody would suppose and believe. I would allow her to be buried. That night I would have the body taken up and taken to a certain house where everything would be in readiness for its reception. I would go there, administer the antidote, restore her to life, and then inform her father of what I had done. He would say I had done well. We would keep her there until convincing proof of Herold Keenan's unworthiness could be produced, or until he had, perhaps by marrying another, made marriage with her impossible."

"Such was my scheme, wild, desperate, but carefully planned. And I set to work to carry it out."

"Late on Thursday afternoon Huldah Barremore died. I had been in the room alone with her for some minutes. Suddenly I called to her father and friends. They came running in, but she was then unable to speak, and in a few minutes ceased to breathe. But she was not dead. By administering the antidote to the drug I had given I could have restored her in ten minutes, or less. But I did not do so. With head bowed with sorrow, playing well my part, I went away."

"Later I informed her father that it was her wish that she be buried in the North End Cemetery, and I advised him against keeping the body longer than until Saturday afternoon. He carried out the supposed wish and my directions fully. The funeral was at two o'clock this afternoon—or yesterday afternoon, since it is now into the early hours of Sunday; and the body was laid to rest in the cemetery I had named."

"In the mean time I had laid well all my plans. I had secured the house and a trusty housekeeper, and had engaged the services of Abner Sharpin. This night at twelve he was to open the grave, take the body out, take it to the house as I had arranged, and then come and inform me. There was little chance for failure, for Abner is a man to be trusted."

"Twelve o'clock came, and I was here in my office counting the minutes. One o'clock, and I began to look for Abner to come. Two o'clock found me still waiting, but by that time I was almost crazed with anxiety. What if he had been discovered and arrested! What if he had forgotten all about it! What if he had betrayed me!"

"All these thoughts and many more harrowed my brain. I was almost in despair when finally

I heard him coming, and I eagerly hastened to let him in. And then, the moment I saw his face I knew that something had gone wrong. Of all the things that had been haunting me as possible to have happened, the most horrible one of all had never once entered my mind. And yet it was that that had upset all my plans. Some one had already been there and opened the grave, and the body of Huldah Barremore was gone."

"Oh, merciful heavens!" springing again to his feet and pacing the floor. "I shall go mad—mad! Where is that fair and perhaps not yet lifeless body? Where is the form that I love above my own life? Oh, my God! what shall I do?"

Daylight found him still pacing to and fro across the office floor.

CHAPTER VI.

THE AWFUL TRUTH VERIFIED.

A RING at the bell, about the time the servant was getting up, was a godsend to Dr. Lairdslaw's harassed mind.

Going to the door, he found there a son of Abner Sharpin's.

The boy was a bright-looking lad of fourteen.

"What's wanted?" the doctor asked.

"Our baby is sick," the boy announced, "and pop says you must come quick."

"What is the matter with the baby?"

"I don't know; I was called up and sent for you on the jump."

"All right. I will be there as soon as possible."

The doctor closed the door, and the boy went away, the doctor returning to his office to prepare to set out immediately.

"Sharpin has discovered something," he mused, "and he takes this way of getting an interview with me. He is a long-headed fellow, is Abner, and no mistake. The baby may be sick, however, so I must go prepared."

In a few minutes he was ready, and set out at once.

When he arrived at his destination it was Abner himself who admitted him into the house.

"What is it, Abner?" the doctor immediately questioned.

"See to the baby first, and then we will talk," was the response.

"Then the child is really sick?"

"Yes."

"What's the matter with it?"

"Almost a case of bad croup, I guess. Come right in here and see it."

Abner led the way into a room where his wife sat with the child on her lap, and the doctor found that the case was not a trifling one, though not really serious or immediately dangerous.

When the doctor had prescribed, and was ready to take his leave, Abner went with him to the front door, where they stopped to talk.

"Well, have you been able to learn anything?"

Little need to mention which man asked the question.

"Not a thing," was the response. "Yes, I have, too; I know that no body was taken to the Deedham College. That's all I have found out. You see I dare not make any inquiries. I found out that the matter is known to the police, and that they are on the lookout for the fellows who robbed the grave."

"So soon?"

"Yes; that Dominie must have put them onto the racket as soon as we let him go."

"So it looks. That being the case, we can do nothing but wait and see what comes of it all."

"That is all we can do. I dare not say 'peep' in the matter now."

"Well, at any rate, keep your eyes and ears open, Abner, and if you learn anything, do not fail to let me know."

"You can depend on me for that."

"Remember that offer of mine is still open. Get at the bottom of this mystery for me, and you shall have the other half of that hundred."

"I'll do my best. I am as much interested as you are."

"Ah, no, Abner; you do not know what you are saying now. But, mind, not a word about this matter to a living soul."

"You can rest easy about that."

So they parted, and the doctor returned home.

Breakfast was just ready, and his mother was waiting for him.

"Goodness!" she exclaimed, at sight of him, "where have you been, Mervyn, and what is the matter with you? Are you really ill?"

"No, I am not ill," was the answer, with as cheerful a tone and manner as he could force, "but I have spent a sleepless night. A cup of your good coffee and a little rest will fix me all right, I guess."

"But where have you been?" his mother persisted. "Who is so sick as to give you such anxiety?"

"Oh! I have several bad cases on hand, mother; persons whom you would not know, even were I to tell you their names. Let us say noth-

ing more about it. You know I like to get away from my profession as much as I can."

So he put her off, and the subject of conversation changed. Still the mother was not altogether deceived. She knew well enough that there was something of more than ordinary importance preying upon her son's mind.

It was about an hour after breakfast, or about nine o'clock, when there came another ring at the bell.

Being in his office, the doctor answered it himself.

He found there one of the servants from Mr. Barremore's house.

"Mr. Barremore wants to see you immediately," the servant said.

The doctor felt himself pale. Had Mr. Barremore learned the awful truth so soon?

"Is anybody sick?" he asked.

"No, nobody sick," was the response; "it must be important, though, for Mr. Barremore is dreadfully excited."

"Well, just wait a moment and I'll go right along with you."

When they arrived at the house Dr. Lairdslaw found Mr. Barremore seated in his library, his face wearing an expression of deepest distress.

"What is the trouble, Mr. Barremore?" Mervyn asked.

"I am glad you have come so promptly, Mervyn, my boy," Mr. Barremore greeted. "I do not know whether I am awake or dreaming. Just read this."

As he spoke he pushed a letter across the library table.

Mervyn took it up and read it.

It was as follows:

"MR. CLEMENT BARREMORE:—

"DEAR SIR:—I scarcely know how to word what I desire to communicate to you. A terrible thing has happened. Your daughter's grave has been desecrated—her body has been stolen. I notified the police immediately upon making the discovery, and consider it my duty to make it known to you. Nor is this all. If you will call at the parsonage at noon I will explain fully. Respectfully yours,

"RUY RODMAN."

Dr. Lairdslaw had to brace every nerve to play the part that was forced upon him so unexpectedly.

"Great heavens!" he exclaimed, "this cannot be true; there must be some mistake."

"So I think, or at any rate so I hope," said the unhappy father. "I must go and see the clergyman immediately, and I want you to go with me."

"You want me to go with you?"

"Yes; and why not? Was not poor Huldah almost as dear to you as she was to me? Oh! if she had not been so blind and headstrong, Mervyn, she might have been nearer and dearer to you, if possible."

The doctor's agitation was great, and he could hardly control his voice.

"I will go with you," he said, huskily.

"Mervyn, my boy—would that I could say my son!—give me your hand. I knew that you would not fail me. If I have given you pain by my words, forgive me. We will set out immediately."

"That will not do," the young doctor reminded, "for he names noon as the hour when he will see you."

"I cannot wait till then; I must go now, at once."

"It will be useless to do so, Mr. Barremore, for by the time we could reach there he would be about beginning his morning service."

"Yes, that is so. I did not think of that. But, at any rate we can go to the cemetery and see the grave, and perhaps have it opened."

"Yes, we can do that, and we will."

No proposition could have pleased Dr. Lairdslaw more. Of all things, he desired most to see that empty coffin with his own eyes.

Mr. Barremore made himself ready for the street in as short a time as possible, and they set out without delay.

They talked as they walked along, their conversation, of course, being upon the theme that was uppermost in their minds. Great and greatly different were the emotions that filled their breasts.

"Have you seen Herold Keenan lately?" Mr. Barremore presently asked.

"Not since Thursday," Mervyn answered.

"Nor have I. Where can he be?"

"I neither know nor care."

"Nor I. I cannot help feeling that, even at so terrible a cost, my child has been saved from a fate that was worse than death."

The young doctor offered no response, and for some distance they both remained silent.

At length they reached their destination.

It was by this time after ten o'clock, and persons were beginning to arrive for worship, so they knew it would be useless for them to stop in at the parsonage.

They crossed the portico of the church and passed on out into the cemetery, and made their way to the grave.

Plenty of evidence was in sight to show that it had been disturbed. The lid of the box was lying at one side, and the clayey earth was spread and tracked all around for a distance of

several feet. Some policemen and quite a group of curious men were standing idly about.

Some of them recognizing Mr. Barremore and the doctor, way was made for them immediately, and they drew near.

For some moments no one spoke.

Mr. Barremore was the first to do so.

"It is plain to be seen that something has been done here," he remarked. "I want this grave opened at once."

One of the men who were standing around happened to be sexton of the cemetery. He was also one of the pillars of the church.

"Not on a Sunday morning!" he gasped.

"I care nothing for the day in such a matter as this," retorted Mr. Barremore. "Who are you, sir?" he asked.

"I am the sexton," the man informed.

"And will you see that the work is done as soon as possible?"

"Not on a Sunday, sir. I cannot—"

"Then we shall have to do it without you. Five dollars apiece to any two men who will perform the task."

At that price willing men were soon found, and they set to work immediately. In less than half an hour the job was done and the coffin was laid bare. Nothing was in it but a quantity of mud and dirt. That the body of Huldah Barremore was gone was a fact about which there was not the shadow of doubt. It was no secret, either, and in the course of the day thousands flocked to the cemetery to gratify their idle curiosity by a look into the empty grave.

CHAPTER VII.

A SIGNATURE RECOGNIZED.

In the mean time, as soon as the morning service was over and the congregation dismissed, Mr. Barremore and Mervyn Lairdslaw went into the parsonage.

The young clergyman was ready to receive them.

He conducted them up to his study and closed the door.

As he was acquainted with Dr. Lairdslaw, there was no need of the introduction which Mr. Barremore proceeded to give.

"Of course you are here in response to the note I sent you by messenger," the clergyman remarked, as soon as all were seated.

"Yes," Mr. Barremore assured, "and I am more than anxious to know what you can tell me. How came you to learn of this matter?"

"In quite a remarkable way, sir. But, have you had the grave opened? I saw you go out there."

"Yes, we have had it opened."

"And you have proved the truth of what I said in my note?"

"We have."

"Have you any suspicion as to who can have done this thing?"

"Not the slightest."

"It is remarkable, but the fact that the body is missing is not the most remarkable part of it?"

"Indeed!"

"It is even so. Will you permit me to ask a question before I proceed with my story?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Well, it is this: Do you know any person named Herold Keenan?"

Both Mr. Barremore and Mervyn Lairdslaw started, and they looked at each other in surprise, wondering what could be coming.

"I know the rascal," Mr. Barremore owned.

"May I inquire something about him? Was he anything to your daughter?"

"He was her lover," said the father. "I had forbade him the house, but my daughter had a mad infatuation for him, and I suppose she would have married him in spite of me if she had lived."

The young clergyman listened to this with wide-open eyes and bated breath. It pointed to something that baffled his powers of reasoning.

"Why, what do you know about him?" Mr. Barremore demanded, as the clergyman did not immediately respond.

"I hardly know how to answer you," the clergyman confessed. "It is all so strange that it seems like a dream."

"I am impatient to hear what you have to say, sir," Mr. Barremore reminded.

"Yes, and I must proceed. First of all, however, I must remind that you were a stranger to me when you came here last Thursday evening. I had never seen you before, and do not know that I had ever heard your name. In a city of this size, and located as I am upon its very outskirts, there is nothing strange about that. Your daughter I had never seen before seeing her in her coffin. You will understand why I make mention of this as I proceed."

"Last evening, in the hardest of the rain, there came a ring at the bell, and when my housekeeper opened the door she found there a couple who desired to get married. They were wet through, and did not advance further than just within the door, and the man wanted the ceremony performed as quickly as possible. He said they had come a long distance, had got caught in the shower, and had to catch the ten o'clock train without fail."

"They were truly in a sorry plight, but I had no reason to doubt the story they told, so I married them."

"Who were they?" Mr. Barremore asked.

"I will tell you in just a moment, sir. At first sight of the woman I knew that I had seen her face somewhere before, but I could not recall where. Then when I came to learn her name, that sounded strangely familiar, but I did not know where I had heard it. It was not until after they had gone away that the truth burst upon me. The name the woman gave was Huldah Barremore, and her face reminded me of the face of your daughter as I saw it yesterday in the coffin."

The effect of these words can hardly be described.

Dr. Lairdslaw paled to the very lips, and felt as though he would faint. Mr. Barremore sprang to his feet, his face pale and his eyes flashing, and his hands clinched.

"Who was the man?" he demanded.

"He gave his name as Herold Keenan," was the answer.

"Great heavens!" Mr. Barremore cried, "can such a thing be possible?"

Turning upon the doctor, he demanded:

"Is such a thing possible, doctor?"

"It is not," Lairdslaw hoarsely responded.

So he answered, but in his heart was the awful doubt. Well he knew that the young lady had been buried alive, but he was the only one who did know it. He had, however, hinted at such a thing to Abner Sharpin. Could it be possible that Abner had betrayed him, and delivered the body to Keenan, who, in some way or other, had restored the girl to life? But, no—it was impossible. Nothing but the antidote to the poison he had administered could have wrought the change so suddenly, and he knew that Keenan nor any one else knew anything about that. Besides, she could not so soon have regained strength sufficient to perform the part the clergyman had described. But, the doubt, the awful, the harassing doubt!

"Of course you do not doubt that I am speaking the truth," the clergyman observed.

"Not at all, sir," Mr. Barremore assured; "but there is some awful mistake here. The dead do not come to life in these days."

"So I try to make myself believe," the clergyman remarked. "It was easy enough to do so at first, comparatively; but after I learned that the grave had been robbed, I knew not what to think. Was this woman your daughter, who had not been dead at all? Or—Or what?"

Can a more trying situation he imagined?

It was trying for the young clergyman, it was doubly so for the bereaved father, while for the doctor it was almost unbearable.

"My God!" the father moaned, as he strode to and fro, wringing his hands, "I am at a loss to understand this. What can it mean? oh! what can it mean? Was my child not dead, and did that rascal know it? Is this some hideous trick they have been bold enough to plan and carry out? Heavens! it will drive me mad!"

"What time did the couple come here?" asked Doctor Lairdslaw.

"It was a little after nine," the clergyman informed.

"And they were wet through?"

"Yes."

"How was the woman dressed?"

"It is not easy to say, but her clothes seemed to be of good material and stylish in make, though they were running wet and all out of proper shape."

"Did she appear to be weak?"

"She was very pale, and her hand trembled as she wrote her name—"

"She wrote her name!" cried Mr. Barremore; "show me that signature, quick."

The clergyman soon produced the marriage form to which the couple had affixed their signatures.

"It is her writing!" the father exclaimed; "it is in my daughter's hand! See it, Mervyn; note the great, round B; is it not her own signature?"

The doctor took the paper into his trembling hand and looked at it.

His face grew even more pale than before, if possible.

"It is very like her writing," he had to admit.

"It is her signature," Mr. Barremore cried. "Oh! to what frightful deception has my child stooped? How did they carry out the hellish scheme? Where are they now? I will have them arrested and punished, if there is any law to reach such a case; for she is my child no longer. I disown her forever!"

"It is altogether impossible," declared the doctor, flatly. "I will never believe it. Even admitting that she was taken out of the grave and brought back to life, she would have been too weak to stand. I tell you it was not Huldah Barremore!"

"But, her signature; have I not seen it thousands of times?" demanded the father.

"Any one may have imitated it."

"I can't believe it; besides, Mr. Rodman here recognized her as my daughter, as soon as he could recall where he had seen her."

The young doctor groaned.

"I cannot see how it was that you did not recollect where you had seen the face, sir," he observed, addressing the clergyman; "and especially after you heard the name mentioned."

"Now that is passed, I cannot understand it myself," Ruy owned. "The only way that I can explain it is that the funeral was an event so recent that I overlooked it, coupled with the fact that I could not naturally suspect any connection between a funeral and a wedding."

"That is true, true. I can understand it now. The rest of it, though, I cannot understand."

"Have you told us all you have to tell, sir?" asked Mr. Barremore.

"No," responded the clergyman, "for I have not told you how I came to know that the body had been taken from the grave."

"Go on with your story, then."

Dr. Lairdshaw knew what was coming now, and it had little interest for him. His brain was busy with other thoughts. Could it be possible that Huldah Barremore had been taken from her grave and resuscitated? and that she was now the wife of Herold Keenan? No, he decided, it was not possible; but he was placed in such a situation that he could not express his belief too emphatically.

"I had just finished writing a sermon," the clergyman proceeded, "and it was about half-past one o'clock, when there came another ring at the bell. I went to the door and found there a man who said his mother was dying, and who wanted me to go and pray with her. I made ready immediately and set out with him. We had not got past the cemetery when another man attacked me, and together the two forced me to go with them and point out the grave where your daughter was buried. They threatened to kill me if I refused. I had to comply, but when we came to the grave it was open, and there was no body in it. I received the impression that these men had just opened the grave and found it tenantless. As soon as they allowed me to go I went and informed the police, and at an early hour this morning sent the note to you that you received."

"This is all I know about the more than mysterious case, sir. I do not know who the two men were, nor would I be able to recognize now the one who came to the door with the foul lie upon his lips. You have heard all that I can tell. Whether it was really your daughter that I married, I cannot say. Everything indicates that it must have been. Whether it was she or not, the couple are legally married, provided they were legally marriageable."

Further questions were asked by Mr. Barremore and the doctor, but no new or especially interesting facts were brought out, and finally they took their leave, the young clergyman assuring Mr. Barremore that he would do everything in his power to help in unraveling the mystery.

CHAPTER VIII.

HEROLD KEENAN'S STORY.

IN one of the quaint old houses of Deedham lived an aged woman named Margaret Keenan. She had never married, was very wealthy, and was crowding close upon ninety years, with every prospect of reaching a hundred.

She was bright and spry, and her mind had lost but little of its vigor. She had keen eyes, eyes that needed no glasses, and her teeth were seemingly as good and sound as they had been fifty years before. In truth, she did not look to be anywhere near as old as she really was.

This woman was a great-aunt to the Herold Keenan whose name has been mentioned in the preceding chapters.

She employed two servants, besides an old woman named Nora McCune who acted as her maid and companion.

This woman was nearing seventy, and looked older than her mistress.

On this Sunday morning, the two were seated together in a sitting-room, on the second floor of the house, enjoying a cup of tea.

"I wonder where that boy Herold can be," the old mistress observed.

"I would tell ye, did I but know," responded the aged maid.

"Right well do I know that, Nora," the mistress rejoined. "I suppose he will not care to come and see me in a hurry, now that Huldah Barremore is dead."

"Perhaps not, ma'am."

"You know what I have so often told him, Nora."

"That same I do, ma'am; I mind it right well."

"I have told him that unless he could win and marry a Barremore, never a cent need he expect to get of my fortune."

"So ye have, ma'am, and many's a time, too."

"And you know the reason, Nora."

"I do that."

"You will tire of hearing me talking about it so much, though, Nora."

"Not a bit of it, ma'am. Me heart is in it almost as much as your own, for sure it is almost one with yourself that I seem to be."

"And so you are, almost, Nora, dear. We have been together so long that we are 'most like sisters, I believe."

"The boy could not help the lady's dying, of course."

"Of course not, but he must feel discouraged. You know I have made the assertion so positive. Marry Huldah Barremore, I have told him, or not a cent of my fortune do you handle. Marry her, and everything that I own shall be yours at my death. Unless you do marry her, everything shall be willed to the church."

"So you have told him many and many a time, ma'am."

"And you know why I wanted him to marry her."

"Indeed I do, and me heart was with ye."

"I like to talk about it, Nora."

"Nor do I blame ye."

"Away back in the old times, Nora, in dear old Ireland, lived the family of Barremore. There may be more families of that name than this one, but it is this one that I mean. They were rich, and noble blood was in their veins, 'tis said. They had bond-servants many, and among them were my ancestors, the family Keenan."

"As I have often heard ye tell, ma'am."

"But that was years and years ago, Nora, and now, in this land, one family is just as good as another. But the old memory remains, and it is the desire of my heart to see, before I die, the two families made one by marriage, and so made blood-equal at last."

"May ye live to see the day!"

"But my only hope is in Herold, the only living male of our family, Nora; and now he must begin his work all over again."

"Alas, alas!"

"So you may well say. He assured me that the girl loved him, and that only for her father's opposition he could marry her at any time. I told him to get her to elope with him, and only a few days ago he told me she had agreed. Oh! why did she die, why did she die?"

"Sorry the day, ma'am."

"Indeed, yes. Now my only hope is in his being able to find another of the same family, and in his winning her."

"Which he may be able to do, seeing he is young and handsome."

"I hope so, I hope so; but you see he is discouraged. Here Barremore is as rich as I am, and if Herold could only have married Huldah, it would have made a lord of him, so it would."

"But, you wouldn't leave him quite, penniless, anyhow, now, would ye, ma'am?"

"Sure, he will never be told that I wouldn't. Let him think that he will be a beggar when I am gone, and it may make him try hard to carry out my wishes."

"Right ye are in saying that."

"But I wish he would come and see me. He is the only living relative I have, and I have more regard for him than I would have him know."

Just at that moment there came a ring at the bell.

"That may be him!" the maid exclaimed.

"The good saints grant it may be."

One of the servants was heard to go to the door, and after some delay a heavy step was heard on the stairs.

"It's he, it's my boy Herold!" the old woman exclaimed.

The step came nearer, and the door opened and a man seemingly fifty years old stepped into the room.

He stood for a moment without speaking, and then, seeing the look of consternation upon the faces of the two women, gave a laugh and removed a wig and false beard from his head and face.

It was Herold Keenan.

"I thought I could not mistake the step," the old woman exclaimed; "but why do you come this way in disguise? Sure no Keenan need ever be ashamed to show his face to the world, Herold."

"I am aware of that, dear aunt, but it is policy to wear it on this occasion. I have news for you that will make your heart glad."

"News for me that will make my heart glad," the old woman repeated; "and what can it be? Sit down, Herold, and tell me all about it."

The man took a chair, and paying no attention to the presence of the aged maid, announced:

"Aunt Margaret, I am the fortunate and happy husband of Huldah Barremore; she is my happy wife."

The old woman and her elder-looking maid were both struck speechless.

"But she—she is dead!" the mistress finally managed to exclaim.

"No more dead than you are," Herold assured.

"But, Herold, she is," the old woman persisted. "Haven't we seen it in the papers? and wasn't it only yesterday that her funeral was?"

"And if you see the papers of to-morrow you will see that that will surprise you, and that I tell you."

"What is it you can be meaning, Herold? Come, don't be speaking in riddles, but tell me all about it. You say Huldah Barremore is alive?"

"She is alive and well, and my happy wife."

"Heaven bless you if it be true, my boy, and

my fortune shall be yours; but, tell me all about it."

"I will do so straightway, dear aunt."

"In the first place, then, let me say that I loved her truly. Even had she been poor, and I without prospects, still would I have done just what I have done and married her. But, with her father worth his hundred thousand or so, and the promise of all your wealth if I would marry her, you may be sure that I would move heaven and earth, if necessary, to gain that end."

"Well spoken, Herold, like the Keenan you are!"

"But her father was opposed to me, as I have so often told you," Herold went on, "and to gain her seemed impossible. He had spies upon me, and when I planned to elope I found that I could never carry it out. What to do I did not know."

"And you a Keenan?"

"Yes, and I a Keenan. I was puzzled. She was willing enough, but she, too, was watched, and no opportunity was given us. At last, however, I hit upon a desperate plan, and proceeded to carry it out. In New York is an old doctor whom I have long known, and what he does not know is not to be learned. I went to him. I asked him to give me something that would make a person seem as dead for a time, so that the person might be buried without danger, and then something that would bring the person to when dug up."

"Merciful Virgin!" the two old women exclaimed, crossing themselves piously, "what are you saying, anyhow?"

Herold smiled at the sensation he had made.

"Hear me out and you will know," he said.

"This old doctor held back for some time, and in order to gain his help I had to tell him the truth. Then he gave me what I wanted, and directed me carefully how to use it; and upon my paying him a good price and swearing that I would not reveal his name, he allowed me to depart with the drugs and information."

"When I returned to Deedham I managed to get an interview with Huldah, and she, as eager and anxious and desperate as myself, agreed to take the drugs as directed, and carry out the terrible deception. And she did. She commenced the medicine, just as directed, was taken sick, and a doctor was sent for. He prescribed for her, but none of his medicine passed her lips. She continued to get worse, and on last Thursday she died, to all intents and purposes."

"I kept well out of sight, as you know, but I was on hand at her funeral, in disguise, and saw where she was buried. That night, as soon as it was dark, I opened the grave, took her dear form out, and carrying it to a near-by house, brought her to. Clothing was all ready for her, and as soon as she was dressed and could command the strength, we set out for the parsonage of the very clergyman who had preached her funeral sermon. I intended to be bold about it. A shower was threatening, but I thought we would have time to get there before it broke upon us. But we had not. It came on suddenly, and we were soon wet through."

"Well, we entered the parsonage, and the clergyman married us without question, although he looked sharply at Huldah, as though wondering where he had seen her before. As soon as we were made one we went away, and we took the next train for New York, where Huldah now is. To-morrow, if you will give me the means to carry out my plan, we will take passage for Ireland, and after a few weeks, when the excitement has quieted down, we will return and take our proper stations in society. Will you give me the help I need?"

For some minutes the old woman was silent.

Presently she spoke.

"This is a strange story," she observed. "What proof can you show me, Herold, that what you say is true?"

"If you could and would go," was the answer, "I could take you to New York, and show you my happy wife herself. As you cannot do that, allow me to show you her marriage-certificate, and this photograph which we had taken not two hours ago."

CHAPTER IX.

THE PROOFS ACCEPTED.

OLD Margaret Keenan took the paper and the photograph eagerly, and moving to where the light was strongest, proceeded to examine them carefully.

She read the certificate over several times, and then looked long and earnestly at the picture.

"You say you were married last night during the shower," she presently observed, "and that you came away in the rain immediately after the service had been performed."

"Such are the facts," Herold assured.

"Well, then," the old woman shrewdly asked, "how is it that this certificate did not get wet?"

"I see you are as keen as ever," remarked Herold, laughing. "It is easily explained. The clergyman kindly wrapped it in this piece of oiled paper."

It was the same oiled paper from which he had just taken it.

"I see. But, how could you get the picture at such an early hour on Sunday morning?"

"Money can procure anything in the city of New York, my dear aunt," was the reply to that. "I knew that you would want proofs, so I set to work in earnest to get them. What better proof can you ask than this picture of Huldah and me, taken, as you know it must have been, this very morning."

"How do I know that it was taken this morning? What proof have I that it was taken so recently?"

"Did you ever see me in this suit of clothes before?"

"No."

"This suit was bought last night, after we reached New York. Here is a bill of sale for it, dated. You see it is this suit that I have on in the picture."

"I am convinced," the old woman declared. "I ask no more proofs. The word of a Keenan ought to be enough to satisfy, anyhow, without anything more."

"Thank you, dear aunt; and now that you are convinced, what about the help I require?"

"How much money will you need?"

"I ought not to go away with less than a couple of thousand in hand."

"I will give you more. But, why need you go away at all? What did you mean by saying that you would go away till the excitement had quieted down?"

"Ah! I have not told you all. I will do so. This morning, as I arrived here, I found the city excited. It has become known that the body of Huldah Barremore has been stolen from the grave."

"So soon?"

"Yes. I quietly inquired how it was known, and it seems that some rascally ghouls were surprised in their work last night, and that the grave was discovered to be empty. The police were informed, and they are now on the lookout for the rascals. So, you see, in addition to the fact that it was our plan to go away anyhow, it is now far better that we should do so for the present."

"Yes, I can see that you are right. Don't you think so, Nora?"

"Indeed I do," was the hearty response. "Give the bold couple plenty of money, is my advice, and let them have a royal honeymoon."

"That is what I will do."

"And our blessings go with them, too."

"It seems too uncanny to be real," the old great-aunt meditated. "I can hardly realize it. Still, I know that you would not dare to come to me with a story that you could not prove, Herold."

The man took on the most injured air he could assume.

"I am sorry now that I did not take you into my confidence before," he said. "If I had brought the body here, where you could have witnessed it all with your own eyes, it would have been better. But, I could not do that; the shock would have been too great for you; and I am afraid, too, that you would have opposed so desperate a scheme."

"Yes, yes, I certainly would. And I could never have allowed such work in my house."

"I knew it, and for that reason I did not mention it to you. Oh! if you only knew the anxiety that has been upon my mind."

"I can believe it."

"Still, aunt, if there is any shadow of doubt in your mind, I will risk all and bring Huldah here to see you."

"No, no, I am satisfied."

"I am glad. Indeed, my manner ought to be proof enough. Do I look like a lover mourning over a dead bride? Hardly!"

He laughed most cheerfully as he said this.

"No," he added, "rather have I cause to laugh and be merry, for the woman whom I love is now mine forever, and I have redeemed myself in your favor. What I have gained is more than worth all the risks I have run."

"You are of the true Keenan stock," the old woman complimented, "and I am proud of you. No Keenan ever allowed himself to be beat in love. You are like your grandfather and his fathers before him."

"I am glad that what I have done meets your approval so thoroughly."

"Meets my approval! It is the one wish of my heart realized. Now are the Keenans blood equals with the Barremores! Now I am ready to die, and I can die happy. To-morrow my will shall be made, and in your favor, Herold, and then I shall patiently await the end."

"And may the end be many years away," cried Herold.

"It cannot be very many, my boy."

"I hope it may. And I, to-morrow, shall be on my way across the broad ocean with my bonnie bride."

"Ah! that reminds me of what you want. Nora, dear, will you go and bring my strong box?"

"Gladly will I do that same, ma'am," the aged maid answered, and she rose and tottered from the room.

"When do you intend to inform Mr. Barre-

more of what you have done?" the old aunt asked.

"I shall mail a letter to him to-morrow, as we are about to sail. He will then have plenty of time to think over what he will do about it."

"That is a good idea. It makes little difference now what he does about it. My fortune will be sufficient for you, even should you not get hers."

"But I will get hers too, for he loves his daughter well."

"I hope that you may."

In a few minutes the maid returned with the box she had been sent for, and the mistress taking it from her hands, opened it.

A large sum of money was disclosed to view.

A close observer would have noticed that Herold eyed it greedily, and had he not been playing for a higher stake, it might have tempted him to his fall.

Taking up two packages, she handed them to him, saying:

"Count this, Herold, and see how much it is."

The man took the packages and ran over the bills rapidly, and when he had done he announced:

"It is four thousand; two thousand in each package."

"Very well, take it, and on such an occasion as this I will not caution you to be careful of it. If you want more, let me know."

"Thank you, aunt; and now I will go, as I must catch the noon train and get back to New York. Under the circumstances, you will pardon my haste."

"Yes, indeed. Go, my boy, and may you and your bride be happy."

Considerable of small talk followed, with which we have nothing to do, and in a little time Herold resumed his disguise and took his leave, leaving the two old women to chatter away over the good news his coming had brought.

"Oh! but Herold is a Keenan, through and through!" old Margaret exclaimed.

"Indeed he is that same!" echoed Nora, the maid.

"Who but a Keenan could have thought of such a scheme?"

"No one at all at all."

"Well do you say that, Nora. I am proud of the brave boy. Do not let me forget to-morrow and send for my lawyer. My will shall be made without delay."

"I will mind, ma'am."

"He deserves all that I can give him, and so does his bride, the brave girl that she is. Oh! but this is the proudest day of all my life. Now at last are the Keenans equals of the Barremores in every way."

In the mean time the object of their conversation was making his way to the railroad station. No one recognized him, and he reached the station just in time for the train he desired to catch.

Within the hour he was back again in New York.

Not hurrying to catch a car leaving the ferry, he waited until all the other passengers had gone their ways, and then taking a car he gained the point he had in view. When the car started he was its only passenger.

He dropped his nickel into the box, and then, as soon as the driver had looked around to note how many passengers he had, proceeded quickly to remove his false hair and beard.

The alteration in his appearance was quite wonderful. Now he was again Herold Keenan.

When the driver of the car looked around next time, he gave a start of surprise. He did not know that one passenger had left the car and another had entered. By his expression it was clear to be seen that he was puzzled.

In order to make the deception perfect, Keenan paid his fare a second time, and the driver was left to wonder how it could be.

In the course of its many windings, this road ran through the street on which Herold Keenan and his bride had taken lodgings, and in a little time the young husband was again with his bride.

Their greeting was with a kiss.

"Do you feel any ill effects from your severe wetting, Huldah, dear?" Herold asked solicitously.

"Not the least," was the gay response. "I feel as well as ever I did. Now I am eager to know the result of your trip."

"It was successful."

"Good! Then your aunt believed, did she?"

"Yes, as soon as I presented the proofs. She gave me the money I required, and more. She sent her love to you, too, and wishes you all happiness."

"Which is sure to be ours."

"Indeed, yes. But, come; we have some work to do. You must write to your father to-day, so that the letter can be posted before we go away to-morrow."

"I shall be only too glad to do that. Do you think he will ever forgive me, Herold?"

"Oh, yes, Huldah, he will be willing enough to forgive you, when you have been absent from him for some weeks. He will come around all right."

"I certainly trust that he will."

CHAPTER X.

MR. BARREMORE'S VIEW CONFIRMED.

WHEN Mr. Barremore and the doctor went away from the parsonage, they walked for some distance in silence.

Mr. Barremore was the first to break it.

"Am I really awake?" he demanded, "or am I dreaming?"

"Would that it were only a hideous dream," Mervyn moaned.

"Can you understand it?"

"I cannot."

"Can you believe it?"

"I cannot."

"And yet it must be true. The grave has been robbed of its dead, that we positively know; and we know, too, that this young clergyman has told us no lie. Last night he married Herold Keenan and Huldah Barremore."

"Then you are ready to believe that you actually buried your daughter alive, are you?" the doctor interrogated.

"Heavens! it does not seem reasonable, and yet it must be so. It is a mystery that is maddening."

No one could realize this better than Dr. Lairdslaw, knowing what he knew.

"You are right when you say that," he returned. "I wish I could understand it."

"Do you think it possible that she can have been buried alive?" Mr. Barremore asked.

"Such cases have been observed," the doctor evasively answered.

"But, even so, how could Herold Keenan know that she was alive?"

"You ask me something that I cannot answer."

"Does it look reasonable that he could?"

"It does not. It looks altogether unreasonable and impossible."

"But, supposing that he had such knowledge, and that he is actually my son-in-law, where is he now?"

"Would that I could tell you."

"But, most important of all, what ought I to do under the circumstances?"

"You are an older man than I, sir, and your judgment is far sounder," the doctor put off.

"Then you will not advise me, Mervyn?"

"I know not what to advise. It all depends upon whether you believe this romance-like story or not."

"What else can I do than believe it?"

"Only the opposite."

"Disbelieve?"

"Yes."

"And how can I do that, in the face of all that is set forth?"

"It is hard, I admit."

"But, do you mean to say that you disbelieve? That you do not believe that it was my daughter that was married?"

"I have just admitted that it is hard to disbelieve. We believed your daughter to be dead, and we know that she was buried. We have not seen her since, but we know that the body has been taken from the grave. If she was buried alive, and if Herold Keenan suspected as much, then the rest may be believed; but how in the name of all that is wonderful could he suspect such a thing?"

Lairdslaw was almost afraid to talk upon the subject, for fear he would let out some word of his own secret.

"Wonderful as it is, though," the unhappy father decided, "it is true. I can see it in no other light."

"Well, having adopted that view of the matter, what do you intend to do?"

The doctor's question was to the point.

"I don't know," was the answer.

"What can you do? Nothing, that I can see, but await developments. If it is really true as set forth, then you can expect to hear from Huldah in the near future. She will be anxious to return to you, for, much as she loved Herold, or thought she loved him, she loved you devotedly."

"I can well believe that," said the father, chokingly, while tears came into his eyes.

"And what ought I to do?"

"Ah! that is where I must have nothing to say."

"And why not?"

"It would be altogether out of place. Remember, I love Huldah better than I love life."

"I know you do, my boy, and would that she had not been so blind. But, you must help me settle it in my mind. I ask you again, what ought I to do?"

"Of all persons in the world, I am the last who should advise you, sir. If you really desire it—"

"And I do!"

"Well, I will speak out. If these things are true, and of course that will be settled immediately when your daughter returns, then, I say, receive her, forgive her, and use your best influence to make her husband worthy of her in some small degree."

"Ye gods! but I hate him so!"

"I have no love for him, either, but I speak thus for Huldah's sake. The threats you made to prevent her from marrying him you cannot, or at any rate ought not, to carry into effect now."

"Perhaps you are right."
 "I know that I am. If—mark you, I say if—these things are true, you must make the best of the situation. Under her influence and yours, if there is any good in Herold Keenan it may be brought out."

"You lay much stress on the if."

"Yes, I do."

"Then you doubt."

"I shall not believe until proof has been presented that cannot be denied. I saw Huldah dead, and I must see her alive in order to believe."

"I think that we shall see her within a few days at most, if she is well enough to come home."

"Her most likely course will be to write and ask your forgiveness. I do not imagine that they are further away than New York."

"It is hard to tell which you believe, Mervyn. One moment you speak doubtfully, and the next with apparent certainty."

"You must take what I say with the 'if' understood."

"Here is a thought that has just come to me."

"What is it?"

"Do you know anything about Herold Keenan's family and relations?"

"Very little, sir."

"Well, about the only relative he has in an old woman, his great-aunt, who lives in this city. Her name is Margaret Keenan."

"Yes, I know of her."

"She is rich, and naturally Herold has always tried to stand in favor with her, in the hope of getting her money. Now, if anybody knows anything about this affair, it is old Margaret."

"You may be right."

"I am going immediately to see her. Will you go with me?"

"If it is your wish."

"And it is."

So it came about that, while old Margaret and her maid were still talking about the matter, there came a ring at the bell, and Mr. Barremore was announced.

The strong box was hurriedly put out of sight, the room was set in order in about half a minute, and the servant was instructed to show him up.

Mr. Barremore entered soon after, followed by Dr. Lairdshaw.

Barely had greetings been exchanged, when the old maiden lady burst into a laugh.

"He, he, he!" she laughed, "I know what it is that brings you here, Clement Barremore, so you needn't say a word about it. It is all so, and now the Keenans are blood equals with the Barremores. He, he, he!"

"Then you have heard all about it?" Mr. Barremore asked.

Never had he seen the old woman in so cheerful and happy a mood.

"Indeed, yes," she exclaimed. "My boy Herold went away from here not half an hour ago, and I know all about it. Brave boy that he is, says I; and the young lady was no less brave, sir."

"But, aunty," Mr. Barremore urged, "tell us all you can about the strange affair. We know nothing, and are all in the dark."

"I can tell you nothing, but it is letters you will be getting to-morrow, and then all will be made plain to you."

"Why can you not tell us?"

"Herold might not like it. I don't know what your intentions toward the happy pair are, sir."

"If they are married," Mr. Barremore hastened to assure, "I shall make the best of it."

"May the saints bless ye, sir! and that is the most noble thing you can do. It is proud of Herold you will be when you come to know him well, and it is proud I am to know that your daughter is his wife."

"Was she with him, that you are so sure of it?" Dr. Lairdshaw carefully asked, in guarded words.

"Think you that he would come to me with a lie?" the old woman quickly snapped.

"I did not insinuate that," the doctor returned, "but he must have presented some proof to convince you that it is so."

"And so he did, sir. He showed me the marriage-certificate, made out only last night, and also a photograph of himself and the charming Huldah that was taken only this very morning."

"Where was it taken?" Mr. Barremore quickly asked.

"In New York."

Here was one point gained. They knew where the rascal was, and that their guess had been correct.

"And was it really my daughter?" the father asked. "You know I thought her dead," he went on. "I must be sure about it."

"Oh, it was Huldah sure enough," the old woman assured. "And bright and pretty she looked, too."

"And where in New York are they?"

"I do not know. I did not ask. If I did know I would not tell you. Herold said they would write to-morrow, so you will know all then."

Further questioning was useless, and at the end of half an hour the two men took their leave and parted company: Mr. Barremore to return home to brood over the awful mystery, and Dr. Lairdshaw to try and forget it for a time in the round of professional calls that he had been neglecting to make.

CHAPTER XI.

AN UNEXPECTED RECOGNITION.

WE must return to that eventful Saturday night, or more properly, to the early hours of the Sunday that followed upon its heels.

It was about three o'clock when a one-horse wagon loaded with cabbage, and with a canvas spread tied over the load, drove into a ferry-house to cross to New York.

The horse had the appearance of being a fairly good one, the wagon was light but strong, and the driver was a man of fifty, apparently, who wore a full beard and was clad in rough-and-ready farmer attire.

Horse and wagon were considerably defiled with mud.

"You are early this morning, for a Sunday," greeted the man at the gate, in a cheery way, as though he knew the other.

"Ya-as, a leetle," drawled the countryman; "but then it is th' arly bird that gits ther worm, ye know."

"Yes, that's so; but how is it that you come in on Sunday?"

"I've got stuff fer a steamer, an' didn't git it all in yesterday. I want ter git back by daylight, if I kin."

"Oh, that's it, eh?"

"Ya-as, that's how it is."

"Well, here's your change."

"Thank'e."

When the countryman had put the change into his wallet, and had folded the long tongue around it carefully and thrust it deep down into his pocket, he picked up the lines and drove on, and went aboard the waiting boat.

In due course of time he drove off on the New York side, but, instead of going away in the direction of any of the docks, he headed up-town.

As no one who saw him gave him a second thought, however, no one knew or cared in what direction he went.

When he stopped finally, it was at the entrance gate to one of the many medical colleges.

There he hastened down from his load and rung a bell.

Having done that, he waited with his ear to the speaking-tube for a response from within.

Presently it came.

"Who is there?" was demanded.

"Asher Toothwart," was the answer.

"What do you want?" was asked.

"I've got garden-stuff," was the reply to that.

"All right; be down in a minute."

In a little time a door was heard to close, and a man appeared in the court with a lantern.

"Is that you, Bolsters?" the countryman asked, when the man came to the gate and opened the wicket.

"Yes, it's me," was the answer.

"All right, open up and I'll drive right in."

"You've got one, eh?"

"Yes; didn't I say I had garden-stuff?"

"That was what I understood."

The gate was soon opened, and the countryman, if he really was such, led his horse into the court.

As soon as the wagon cleared, the gate was closed behind it.

That having been done, the two men set to work to remove the canvas cover, in order to get at the "garden-stuff" it concealed from view.

As soon as it was off, a long, dark something was seen lying lengthwise in the top of the load.

Taking hold of it they drew it out and laid it on the ground.

It was wrapped in a rough blanket, and its form was terribly suggestive of a human body.

Such it was.

"What is it this time?" Bolsters inquired.

"It's a she," was the blunt, unfeeling answer.

"And where did ye get it?"

"It came up where it was planted."

"Don't want ter tell, eh? Well, no matter. Who is it for?"

"It's for th' same four fellers I sold th' last one to."

"Oh, all right; I'll call Trimmerty up and he'll pay ye for it. He's th' head of th' four."

"All right, I don't care who ye call so long as I git th' rocks an' kin git away as soon as I kin."

"I'll have him out in no time."

The man with the lantern hurried away, returning in about five minutes with another and younger man with him.

"What have ye got?" the latter carelessly demanded.

"The finest cadaver I've raised this season," Toothwart explained.

"You call them all the finest. Hold that lantern, Bolsters, till I have a look at it. I am not over anxious for one, anyhow."

"So you allus say," muttered Toothwart, aside.

The man Bolsters held his lantern so that its light fell full upon the form that was rolled up in the old blanket.

The student bent over and pulled the folds of the blanket away from the face of the corpse, and at sight of the face he gave a start and an exclamation.

"Whew! a beauty!" he ejaculated.

The face was that of a young and pretty woman.

"What'll ye give for that 'un?" Toothwart demanded.

"I'll give you ten dollars."

"Twenty-five or nothin'."

"Never!—I'll give ten, and no more."

"Catch hold, then, Bolsters," directed Toothwart, "and we'll load it on ag'in, an' I'll be off. No time ter fool away, fer I kin sell it at th'—"

"I'll give fifteen," interrupted the student, Trimmerty.

"Twenty-five or nothin', an' say quick."

"I'll give twenty, and not another cent. Take it or leave it, just as you please."

The tone in which this was said seemed to convince Toothwart that he had got to the highest mark, so he said:

"Well, trot out your rocks, then, and it's your corpus."

The money was immediately forthcoming, and the bargain was sealed and the sale made.

"Where did you get it?" the student asked.

"That is somethin' that I can't tell," Toothwart answered.

"Why not?"

"No matter why not; you have got th' stiff, and that is all you need ter care anything about."

"Was it a regular plant?"

"Of course."

"But, how did you ever come to resurrect it on a Sunday morning? How did you know that we would take it off your hands?"

"I had a good chance, and I don't let good chances slip," Toothwart made answer. "As ter sellin' it, I didn't know, of course; but I knowed if you didn't want it I could soon sell it at th'—"

"There, never mind what you could do there; when you have a good one to dispose of, always come here first."

"All right; and now I must git out of here and dispose of these cabbages. I know where I kin do it, even if it is a Sunday."

"Yes, be off with ye," Bolsters urged, "for we don't want daylight to find you here."

"Well, open yer gate an' I'll back right out." "Your wares ought to bring a higher price now," joked Trimmerty.

"Why?" Toothwart demanded.

"They ought to be highly flavored."

"Can't I sell you some of 'em?"

"Not any. I won't eat cabbage in a month."

They all laughed, and Bolsters having opened the gate, Toothwart backed his horse and wagon out and was soon rattling away.

"This is a darling subject!" Trimmerty exclaimed in admiration, when Bolsters had shut and fastened the gate. "I'd like to know where he got it."

"But you never will know."

"No, for he seldom will tell. Well, he got a good price for it, but he might have had the other five if he had hung out for it."

"Better not tell him that."

"Well, no, hardly."

"He'll make it up, for jest like as not he had another in th' load somewhere."

"Very likely he had. Well, lay hold and carry it the room."

They took the body up and carried it into the building, along one of the halls and up a flight of stairs, finally depositing it on the slab in one of the students' dissecting-rooms.

"There, that will do for the present," Trimmerty observed. "I and my three chums will have something to break the Sunday monotony."

They went out, the student locking the door and taking the key with him.

It was about nine o'clock when four students of the college met in the room of the mentioned Trimmerty. They were four who clubbed together in everything, and he, Trimmerty, was the recognized head and leader.

They had just had breakfast, and were now assembled for their morning smoke.

"Fellows," asked Trimmerty, "how shall we put in the day?"

"On the lounge with our papers," responded one.

Other suggestions of a less innocent nature were made, but Trimmerty made light of them all.

"Well, what have you to suggest, then?" demanded one.

"How would you like to cut meat and saw bones?" Trimmerty inquired.

"Ha! just the thing!" they all cried. "But, where is the subject? Are you going to kill your cat?"

"I have got a subject all right," Trimmerty declared. "Come and I'll show it to you."

He led the way to the dissecting-room, the others following, and as they entered Trimmerty

waved his hand toward the slab on which the body lay, saying:

"Gentlemen, allow me to introduce you to Miss Coldone."

A laugh greeted this, and one of the students stepped forward and pulled the covering away from the dead face.

As he did so a cry of mingled surprise and horror escaped him.

"Heavens!" he ejaculated, "I knew this girl! No knife shall touch her fair form, if I can prevent it!"

CHAPTER XII.

STARTLING INFORMATION.

It was a startling interruption.

The other students stood still, speechless with amazement.

For some moments silence reigned, the student who had made the discovery looking steadily at the features of the dead young woman, and the others gazing at him.

This student's name was Buzbee.

"Yes, it is she," he finally decided fully, speaking more to himself than to the others.

"It is who?" demanded Trimmerty.

"A girl whom I knew. I had not heard that she was dead, though."

"What was her name?"

"Jeannette Bingham."

"Why, I have heard you speak of her," cried Trimmerty.

"Of course you have. This is her body. I knew her too well to be mistaken. What can have caused her death?"

"Examination may show."

"It shall not be made, except by our professor, if necessary. We have been able to harden ourselves to almost anything, fellows, but when it comes to seeing some one whom we have known in life laid out before us, then the case is different. I tell you that not even the blanket shall be removed."

Buzbee was considerably larger than the others, and could have carried his point by force, if necessary.

But the others were ready to yield to his wishes.

"What in the world are we going to do with the body, though?" Trimmerty asked, anxiously.

The faces of all were serious enough.

"Who brought it here?" asked Buzbee.

"Toothwart."

"I must find him and hire him to put it back where he found it."

"You can't find him," declared Trimmerty. "No one here knows where he lives, and it is not likely that that is his real name anyhow."

"But, he must be found. How else can we get the body to its resting-place again?"

"That is the serious question."

"How much did you pay him for it?" Buzbee asked.

"Twenty."

"Well, I will pay it back to you. But that is a matter of trifling importance, compared with the dilemma we are in."

"You are right. Something has got to be done, and that without delay. The body must go back where it was taken from."

"Do you know the girl's relations, or friends, Buzbee?" asked one of the three present.

"She hadn't a relation in the world, that I know of," was the answer. "I know where she made her home, however."

"Good. That is one point gained for you, then."

"Explain."

"Well, your move will be to go and see them."

"But, good heavens, man, do you suppose I can let them know anything about this?"

"No, of course not; but you must find out all the particulars of the matter, and, by some means or other, learn where the girl was buried."

"That is your plan, Buzbee," agreed Trimmerty.

"That point gained," continued the author of the plan, "you may be able to get some one to take the body back and put it where it was taken from."

"Yes, I can see that that is my only chance. I will go immediately. In the mean time, I hope that you fellows will respect my wishes. You do not know how this has cut me up."

His manner showed that he was deeply moved, and the others were more than willing to respect his feelings in the matter.

It had come upon them so suddenly that all were much affected.

"I promise you that the body shall not be disturbed," Trimmerty faithfully promised.

"I take your word, and I'll be off and get back as soon as I can."

"By the way," Trimmerty cautioned, "you had better proceed carefully. We do not know but there may have been foul play somewhere in this matter."

"That's so, and I'm glad you mentioned it. Well, I'll be back within two hours."

He left the room immediately, and the others advanced to the slab to take a look at the face of the dead girl.

"She has been a mighty good-looking girl," observed one;

"Right you are," agreed Trimmerty.

"What do you know about her, Trim? You said you had heard Buzbee speak about her."

"I don't know much of anything about her, except that Buzbee had a sort of flirtation with her. I don't know how he made her acquaintance. That was a year ago, however. I know he was half in love with her at the time."

"He is all broke up over it."

"And it's enough to break him up, too. Fancy the shock it must have given him when he recognized her."

"Ugh! it gives me the creeps. I am in no condition to do any cutting and sawing to-day."

"No, nor I."

They pulled the cover over the dead face again and went from the room, locking the door after them.

In the mean time Buzbee was preparing for the street with all haste, and as soon as he could make ready he set out.

He had made the acquaintance of Jeannette Bingham about a year and a half before, on an excursion boat. It had begun with a flirtation, as she was nowise shy of the advances he made, and for some months he had enjoyed her company. At the end of that time she transferred her affections to some one else, and he was dropped as suddenly as he had been taken up.

Since that time, now about a year ago, he had not seen her, and gradually had allowed all thoughts of her to get out of mind. When he saw her under the circumstances described, little wonder that it caused him a start.

He had understood, in fact she had told him, that she had no relations, but as he had accompanied her to her residence on several occasions he had made the acquaintance of the woman with whom she made her home.

A short time found him at the door of that house.

When he had rung the bell, and while he was waiting for some one to come to the door, the recollection of Trimmerty's caution came into his mind.

How, in what manner—in what words, was he to make known his errand?

He was puzzled to know, and before he could frame any plan he heard steps near at hand.

The door opened, and it was by the woman whose acquaintance he had made.

She recognized him instantly, and before he could utter a word, exclaimed:

"Oh! Mr. Buzbee, is it you? I hope you can tell me something about Jeannette. Have you seen anything of her? Do you know where she is?"

The student was speechless with surprise.

"Have you not heard?" the woman demanded; "have you not heard that Jeannette has mysteriously disappeared?"

With an effort Buzbee recovered command of himself, and catching at the cue so fortunately given, responded:

"I had not heard a word of this, Mrs. Blossom. I came here hoping to find Miss Bingham at home."

"Is it possible? Well, come right in, then, and I will tell you all about it."

Buzbee accepted the invitation and entered. He was more than eager now to learn all he could.

The woman conducted him into her sitting-room, and as soon as they were seated she proceeded to set forth the facts of the case.

"Jeannette has not been seen since last Thursday night," she began. "Some one rung the bell about nine o'clock, and she went to the door. Several minutes passed away, and as she did not return to the room and I could hear no voices, I looked out into the hall to see who was there. The door was closed, and Jeannette was not to be seen. I went to the door and opened it and looked out, but she was not in sight. I shut the door and called her name, thinking she had gone up-stairs. There was no response. I searched through the house, but she was not to be found. I sat up till after twelve o'clock, thinking that she had gone out hurriedly with some friend, but she did not come, and nothing has been seen of her since."

Buzbee listened with breathless interest, and he could feel that his face was turning pale in spite of all his efforts to the contrary.

"Have you informed the police?" he asked.

"Yes," Mrs. Blossom answered, "I informed the police early next morning."

"And they have been unable to discover anything?"

"Entirely so. She disappeared utterly from the moment when she left this room to answer the bell."

"It is remarkable. Have you any reason to suspect that there has been foul play of any kind?"

"No, I have not. But, what has brought you here?"

The question was put suddenly, and Buzbee had to respond with the first thought that came to him.

"My relations with Miss Bingham used to be of a tender nature," he replied, "and I came here to see her with the hope that they might be renewed."

He was in a desperate strait, and did not hesitate to resort to falsehood.

"Oh, I understand. Well, poor child, I do not know where she can be. She was wild and full of fun, but I believe that she was good and honest. I have no reason to think otherwise."

"It is a mystery, certainly. I hope that she will soon be found, and that it will be easily explained."

"Yes, I trust so."

Some further talk was had, but Buzbee made his stay as short as possible and hastened back to the college.

When he entered Trimmerty's room the three who were awaiting his return saw at a glance that something was wrong.

"What is it?" Trimmerty demanded.

"It has been foul play," Buzbee hoarsely responded, as he dropped upon a chair. "The girl disappeared suddenly and mysteriously last Thursday night, and has not been seen since. The police are looking for her. We must get rid of that body without delay."

The faces of the four were blanched and serious.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DEAD ALIVE.

THE dilemma had assumed a decidedly serious aspect.

What if the girl had been murdered, and her body should be found in their possession?

That thought was in the minds of all four of the students at the same time, and the minds of all were filled with grave fears.

"What is going to be done?" questioned Trimmerty.

"I'll be hanged if I know," declared Buzbee. "We are in a bad fix now, for a fact. We have no possible way of learning where the body was buried."

"If it has been buried at all," hinted one of the others.

"That's so," agreed Trimmerty. "I believe that fellow Toothwart knows more about the matter than he wanted to tell. I asked him where he had got the body from, but he would not say."

"What answer did he make?" asked Buzbee.

"I believe he said he could not tell. I asked him if it was a regular plant, and he said it was."

"Is there a shroud on the body?"

"I believe there is."

"We ought to make sure," suggested one of the two whose names have not been mentioned, "and we ought to find out the cause of death, too."

"I agree with you," coincided Buzbee, "but I don't want to be the one to make the examination. Confound it! I am as squeamish as a kitten, since I recognized the body."

"And it's not to be wondered at."

"Say, Trimmerty, you are the oldest one among us, and the head of the class; you go in and investigate."

"Shall I do it, Buzbee?"

"Yes, go ahead; some one has got to."

"All right, and I'll soon come back and report."

Trimmerty left the room, and the others continued the discussion of the question as to what should be done with the body.

"Can't you suggest something, Robertsboy?" Buzbee demanded of one.

"I'm afraid not," was the response. "It is too deep for me, for I am not a plotter. Can't you point out a way, Kingwood?" turning to the other.

"We'd better wait till we hear what Trimmerty has to say," that student answered.

"We might take the body out late at night and leave it somewhere in the street," planned Robertsboy. "It would give the police something to wonder over, and they might solve the mystery."

"And they might trace it to our door," objected Kingwood.

"I couldn't agree to that," declared Buzbee. "We must be decent about it, if nothing more. Our only way, as I can see, is to have some one bury the body for us, if any one can be found who will take the risk."

"It is a desperate case, and the remedy must be desperate," declared Kingwood. "You will have to lay aside your fine feelings in the matter, I am afraid, Buzbee."

They were clearly at loss to know what to do.

Their positions were not by any means enviable. To carry out their first intentions respecting the body was now out of the question. How to dispose of it they did not know. To turn it over to the police they dared not, not knowing what was the mystery in the background.

Presently Trimmerty was heard returning, and the three looked to the door with hope kindled that he would be able to suggest a way out of the trouble.

At sight of his face, however, when he opened the door, they all recoiled in horror.

His face was deathly white, beads of perspiration stood out upon his brow, his mouth was agape, and his eyes were fairly starting from their sockets.

He managed to close the door, but sunk immediately upon a chair.

"For heaven's sake what is the matter?" gasped Buzbee.

"It—it—it—"

Trimmerty tried to tell, but it seemed as though he had lost the power of speech.

"Speak!" urged Buzbee; "tell us what it is. Is it a case of murder?"

"The—the girl is—is coming to life!" Trimmerty managed to say.

"What?"

The three uttered the exclamation in the greatest consternation.

"It is the truth," Trimmerty affirmed, now recovering the power to speak coherently.

"Impossible!" cried Buzbee. "You have lost your nerve."

"I tell you it is the truth," Trimmerty insisted. "I am not altogether a fool. The girl opened her eyes and looked at me!"

The others looked now almost as terrified as he.

"It can't be possible," Buzbee still protested. "You must have imagined it, Trim."

"Did you ever hear of my imagination playing me such a trick before?" Trimmerty demanded. "I tell you I know what I am talking about."

He had now recovered from the first shock, and was regaining his balance.

"Tell us all about it," requested Kingwood.

"It is soon done. When I went in I pulled away the blanket from the face and the upper part of the body, and was just noting that it is clad in what has been a fine shroud—for it is so covered with clay that it was not easy to see at a glance what it is—when I fancied that I saw the eyes move."

"I was startled, and looked closer, but soon laughed at myself for allowing my imagination to play me such a trick. Just as I was turning my eyes away, though, I saw the same thing again, and I tell you I felt creepy."

"This time I was determined that I would not be fooled again. If there was anything in it, I would be sure of it. I stood and looked intently at the face for a full minute or two, till finally, just now, the eyes opened wide and the supposed dead girl stared at me wildly. I never had such a turn before in my life. I am completely undone."

"You are not as near undone as you were when you first came in," observed Robertsboy.

"Come," exclaimed Buzbee, "we must see this thing for ourselves. Not that we don't believe you, Trim, but we must have the evidence of sight."

"That's what's the matter," cried Kingwood.

"Come on, then, and see for yourselves," Trimmerty invited, "for I don't blame you for doubting. I wouldn't believe it myself, if I hadn't seen it."

"Have you got your nerve back sufficiently to stand it?" asked Buzbee.

"Yes, I am braced up now; come on."

Trimmerty led the way, and the others followed him from the room, along the hall and into the dissecting-room.

The body was lying on the slab the same as they had seen it before, and there was nothing to indicate that life was present in it. The old blanket had been turned down to the waist, and the face and a sadly mud-smudged shroud were revealed.

When Trimmerty had closed the door the four gathered around the body and began watching it intently.

Presently, to the chilling horror of the beholders, the eyelids began to flutter, and presently they flew open.

Trimmerty and Buzbee drew back a step, but Robertsboy and Kingwood stood their ground.

The girl's eyes had a wild, blank expression, as though there was no spark of intelligence behind their depths, but there was no doubt about her being alive.

After a moment Robertsboy and Kingwood drew away, and Buzbee in a hoarse whisper asked:

"Trimmerty, what on earth is to be done?"

"Goodness only knows," was the response.

"I believe we had better send for Doctor Rockabrown," suggested Kingwood, "and lay the whole matter before him."

"And so get into worse trouble," objected Robertsboy.

"I am inclined to agree with Kingwood," declared Buzbee. "What do you say, Trimmerty?"

"I don't know," Trimmerty evaded. "In the first place we would get rats for having the body here without his knowledge, and in the next place there is no knowing what would come of it, or what sort of a scandal our names might get mixed up in."

"Well, for Heaven's sake suggest something, then," urged Buzbee.

"It is easier to ask than—"

At that moment a hand was laid on the door, and into the room walked Dr. Rockabrown himself.

Trimmerty had neglected to turn the key in the lock, and they were fairly caught.

"Hal! what is going on here, and on a Sunday, too?" the professor sternly demanded.

Buzbee took it upon himself to explain, as he did not want it to become known that he had recognized the girl.

"Doctor Rockabrown," he said, with seeming frankness, "we are in a fix this time in which we have got to deal openly with you. This body was brought here last night, and we bought it. We intended to study it to-day. We have just made the discovery, however, that the young woman is alive."

The professor had stood as though wondering what was coming, and at the final announcement he gave a start and strode quickly to the slab.

Pulling open one of the eyelids, for they had closed again, he looked at the eye for a moment, and then exclaimed:

"You are right; the girl is alive. I must take a hand in this."

Off went hat and coat, and up went his sleeves, and in a few moments the four students were running about bringing things he desired.

"A strange case of suspended animation," the professor observed, as he worked away. "The pectous change of colloidal matter has been held in abeyance, and so *rigor mortis*, coagulation of blood, solidification of nerve centers and cords, and so forth, have been prevented. But what has caused this? Here we are in the dark. It has been suggested that, under certain unknown abnormal conditions, the human body, in its own chemistry, may produce an agent that causes suspension of life, as in the cataleptic condition."

"Be that as it may, gentlemen, what we desire here is to restore heart action, and so— Ah!"

The girl's breast was seen suddenly to rise, and a deep sigh was heard, and from that moment breathing was resumed, and the dead was restored to life. It was a thrilling sight, and while the professor stood and gazed with undisguised delight at his achievement, the four students looked on spellbound in wonder.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MISSING GIRL FOUND.

THE breathing was rather hard at first, but it gradually became regular, and the girl soon showed signs of returning strength.

It had almost the appearance of a miracle. Buzbee touched Trimmerty on the arm and motioned him aside.

"What is it?" Trimmerty asked.

"I am going to get out of here," Buzbee declared. "It will never do to let the girl recognize me. You can let me know what is done in the case."

"All right; get out while the profess' isn't looking. He won't remember who was here when he first came in."

"Yes, he will, for I have talked with him; you can offer some excuse for me, however."

"I'll do it."

Buzbee went quietly out of the room, then, as he had no desire to figure in what might prove to be a decidedly unpleasant scene.

Dr. Rockabrown, meantime, was narrowly watching the resuscitated girl.

There was no doubt about the matter; it was a genuine return of the life action and life force.

Presently the professor turned to the students, and as he did so he looked from one to another of the three, as though he missed some one but was not quite sure of it.

"You, Trimmerty," he directed, "go to your room and bring a chair; and you, Robertsboy, go and find Bolsters and tell him to send his wife here immediately."

Both students sprung to obey.

"In a few moments Trimmerty returned with a chair, and acting under the professor's directions, he and Kingwood wrapped the blanket around the girl and placed her upon it."

"Now," the professor further directed, "roll that slab back out of sight, and we may be able to keep secret some of this affair. I don't understand it myself, yet, but I can see that you have had a narrow escape from taking this girl's life."

The dissecting slab was wheeled back against the wall and a cloth thrown over it, making it look like a simple table, and other unsightly articles were quickly put out of sight.

A few minutes later Robertsboy returned with the night janitor's wife.

She was evidently well used to the sights and secrets of the place, for she entered the room without any signs of fear or nervousness.

"What is it, sir?" she asked.

"You are a woman to be trusted," the doctor began by complimenting, "and I have some work for you to do. I want you to take charge of this woman for the present, provide some clothes for her and wash and dress her. She is very ill. As soon as you are done let me know, and I will have her taken to a hospital. She was brought here by mistake."

"All right, sir; and who will pay for the clothes?" the woman responded and questioned.

"I will see that you are paid," spoke up Trimmerty.

"Any clothes will do," the professor explained: "some old ones of your own, if you can get no others handily."

"And I can't, so I'll put some of mine on her. It is nothin' ketchin', is it, doctor?"

"No, it is nothing contagious," the doctor assured.

"All right, then, I will attend to her."

The professor and the students went from the room, then, and entered that of Trimmerty.

Buzbee was there.

"Now," said the professor, "I want to get at the bottom of this matter, boys. I won't speak now of your disregard of one of my rules, nor of your intended profanation of the Sunday, for this strange case has taken too important a turn. Where did you get this body?"

"Toothwart brought it here this morning, sir," explained Trimmerty, "and we bought it."

"And where did he get it?"

"He would not tell."

"Hal! that looks peculiar. Where can this man Toothwart be found?"

"No one knows, sir. I don't believe that is his real name. He comes here occasionally, and that is all that is known about him."

"That is bad. We ought to get at the identification of this young woman, in some way. You will notice that I am taking steps to keep mention of this college out of the matter. As soon as Mrs. Bolsters finishes her work, I will send for an ambulance and have the girl taken to a hospital, and shall give the explanation that she was brought here by mistake. We must not know who brought her, you understand."

"Yes, we understand."

The students had already brightened up. The professor was finding an easy way out of the dilemma for them. It was not for their sakes that he was doing so, however, but for the sake of his college.

"Very well, and now understand: No doubt we shall be questioned, and our reply must be the same all around. The girl was brought here by unknown persons who mistook our establishment for a hospital. We need not say that she was clad in grave-clothes, you know. The good name of our college must not be tarnished. If no questions are asked, so much the better."

The professor went on then to read the students a pretty severe lecture about their shortcomings in general, but about this case in particular, and by the time he concluded Mrs. Bolsters came to announce that she had accomplished her task.

"Is she any better?" the doctor asked.

"She is some stronger," was the answer, "but awful white, an' she is stark an' staring mad."

"Insane, do you mean?"

"I guess so; anyhow, she don't know anythin'."

"We'll go in and see her."

Dr. Rockabrown led the way, the students and Mrs. Bolsters following, and on entering the other room they found the girl plainly but decently dressed.

She was sitting up in the chair, but was very weak and deathly pale. Her eyes were open wide and she was looking around, but it was seen at a glance that there was no gleam of intelligence in them.

"How do you feel?" the doctor asked, kindly.

The young woman looked at him, but made no attempt to answer.

Buzbee had stopped at the door, not caring to run the risk of recognition, but on seeing the condition of the girl's mind, he went boldly in. Having known her, he could see at a glance that she had lost her reason.

"I say how do you feel?" the doctor repeated, after a moment's pause.

There was still no response, but only the blank stare.

"She has lost her mind," the professor declared. "She knows no more than a new-born babe."

"Is it possible?" ejaculated Buzbee.

Taking the risk, in order to prove the matter, he stepped boldly forward and looked into the girl's face.

No sign of recognition was seen.

"Well," remarked the professor, "we must get her off our hands. You, Buzbee, go and call an ambulance."

Buzbee went immediately to carry out the order, and in due time the ambulance arrived.

"What is wanted?" the surgeon in charge demanded.

"We have got a case here that was brought to us by mistake," Buzbee answered, the professor having left it to him. "A young woman was brought here and left, the person who brought her going away immediately. She is weak and ill, and entirely out of her mind. Doctor Rockabrown says you must take her."

"All right; bring her out."

Trimmerty and Kingwood were just carrying her down-stairs, and in a few minutes she was in the ambulance and rattling away to the hospital.

Dr. Rockabrown set out in the same direction on foot.

"Well, we are well out of a bad fix," observed Trimmerty, when the four had returned to his room.

"Yes, if we are out of it," Buzbee reminded.

"That's so. It is a queer case, by Harry! and now that it is over it seems like a dream."

"It may be more than a dream before it is settled," Buzbee persisted. "You know that now the police will find Jeannette Bingham, and they will be down upon us to learn all they can."

"Say, I'll tell you what you ought to do," spoke up Robertsboy.

"And what is that?"

"You ought to write a note to the woman the girl lived with, in a disguised hand, telling her where the girl can be found."

"Just the thing!" cried Trimmerty. "That will bring the matter right to a head, and the sooner the agony is over the better. Old Rockabrown is too anxious about keeping the truth of the matter still, to let the police get anything here."

"That is what I'll do, and I'll do it at once," Buzbee cried.

"But how will you deliver it?" questioned Kingwood.

"A special stamp will do it."

"Just the thing."

The plan fixed upon, Buzbee went to his own room to write the note.

In the mean time the girl had been admitted into the hospital, and the doctors proceeded at once to ascertain what was wrong.

Their examination resulted in nothing. No marks of violence were upon the body, and no symptoms of any ailment were to be discovered. They were at loss. It was plain, however, that the young woman was in need of nourishment, and that she was out of her mind.

Later in the day there came a ring at the bell of Mrs. Blossom's house, and on going to the door she was surprised to find there a postman.

He had a letter for her, and as soon as he had delivered it and gone away she made haste to learn its contents.

It read as follows:

"Mrs. Blossom:—

"If you want to learn sumthin about the missus girl, go to the bullewer hospital and inkwire there. I am a strainer to you but I happen to no sumthin about the matter."

"Yours truly,

"STRAINER."

Within half an hour after receipt of that letter Mrs. Blossom was at the hospital, where she identified the young woman as the missing Jeannette Bingham, and on the following morning the girl was taken to her house. Where she had been was a mystery, and it was likely to remain a mystery, for the poor girl's mind was a blank. She knew absolutely nothing. She could neither talk, nor understand anything that was said to her. It seemed that she would even have to learn again to walk.

CHAPTER XV.

THE NEWSPAPER VIEW SUPPORTED.

On that Monday morning Dr. Lairdswal was hardly himself.

He had passed another almost sleepless night, and was worn, pale and haggard in appearance.

His mind was in torment. Knowing what he knew, and at the same time puzzling his brain over what he did not know, it is not to be wondered at.

The morning papers had come out with a full glowing account of the case, the reporters telling all the facts they could get hold of, and adding enough matter of their own making to make it highly sensational.

The doctor had just read the two columns and a half given to the report of the affair, and throwing the paper away from him in disgust, had put on his hat and hastened out upon the street to get fresh air, for he felt that he was choking. It was the hour for his morning visits to his patients, so he went about making them, hoping thus to free his mind for a time of the haunting subject.

He did not succeed, for when his visits were done he found that it was still uppermost in his mind. It had been so right along, and he had but a dim recollection of where he had been or what he had done.

His other visits made, he went again to the home of Abner Sharpin, ostensibly to see the sick child.

He found it all right, just as he had expected.

"Where is Abner?" he inquired.

"Out upon his wagon, I suppose," Mrs. Sharp informed him.

Abner Sharpin had a team and wagon, and did a sort of local express business.

It was to see him, really, that the doctor had called, but he had to go away disappointed.

On his way home, however, he met Abner on the street.

Stopping him, he inquired:

"Well, Abner, anything?"

"Not a thing," was the reply.

"Have you seen the papers?"

"Yes; and it is a great case. It is somethin' that I can't git through my head."

"No, nor I. Well, keep your eyes and ears open."

"What's th' use, now that th' whole thing is out?"

"I want to know who it was dug the body up, if nothing more."

"Oh, all right; but I ain't likely ter learn much, seein' that I da'n't ask any questions."

With that they parted, and the doctor went on.

"Confound the newspapers!" he muttered, "they do more harm than good in a case of this sort. Still, I don't know that, either. What everybody is talking about, I can talk about too, without any danger of being suspected of having too much interest in the matter."

"It is all set forth, as far as the reporters could get at it, but they don't know all, nor anywhere near all. What if they knew that Dr. Lairdswal is concerned in it, as he is! Oh! what would I not give to know the truth of the matter! How can it be that that person who married Herold Keenan was Huldah Barremore, when it was next to impossible that she could be conscious at the time? And if it was not she, then what am I? I am a murderer! But, if it was not she, then where is her body? Oh! this is terrible, terrible!"

The papers had indeed set it forth in full. To quote the article would be to take up too much space, since all the facts in the case have been set forth. A brief mention of it may not be amiss, however.

It started by setting forth the situation of affairs between Huldah Barremore and Herold Keenan, dwelling upon the opposition of Mr. Barremore to their union. Then followed the account of Huldah's sickness and sudden death. After that came the report of the marriage performed by Rev. Ruy Rodman on the same night, giving the names of the couple in capitals. Then was set forth the finding of the robbed grave, the report of the case to the police, etc.

The lengthy report closed as follows:

"There is no denying that truth is stranger than fiction. This surpasses the Shakespearean legend of Juliet. Without knowing any more of the matter than has been revealed, we venture to guess at the rest of it. These young persons were determined to marry. They would allow nothing to hinder them. On the other hand, the father of the young lady was equally determined that they should not. Desperate means had to be resorted to. Did Herold Keenan know anything of medicine? If not, money was at his command, and money could buy what he wanted. When we recall the deadly nightshade, and all that we have read concerning it, and reflect that in this nineteenth century there are many more such agents known to medical science, is it going too far to imagine that some one of these drugs may have been administered to the young lady, thus producing a death-like sleep, during which she was buried? At the proper hour the grave was opened by the eager Romeo, the body was taken out and restored to life, and the daring couple were duly married. But it may be asked, what of the two men who appeared in the small hours of the morning and compelled the clergyman to show them the grave of Huldah Barremore? Is it not easily guessed? Did not Herold Keenan employ these men to do this very thing, in order to have it made known that he had secured his prize? To us it seems entirely reasonable, and we eagerly await further developments to bear us out in our theory."

"It is easy to understand," Dr. Lairdswal further reflected, as he made his way homeward, "how this idea of suspended animation has got into the head of the writer of this article. If it was really Huldah Barremore who married Herold Keenan, then it has to be explained how she could be buried and afterward brought to life. There is no other answer to such a question than that set forth. But it was impossible! Were I not concerned in it as I am, I might doubt, but, great heavens! if they only knew the whole truth! If I only dared tell the whole truth! Oh! I shall go mad!"

It was the same round of thought over and over again, and it was of a truth almost maddening.

When he reached home it was dinner-time, and he learned that Mr. Barremore had been there twice to see him.

As soon as he had eat a little, he went to Mr. Barremore's house.

He found that gentleman more than eager to see him.

"Have you seen the paper?" was his immediate demand.

"Yes," Mervyn answered, "I have seen it."

"And you have read about the case?"

"Every word of it."

"Well, what do you think of it? Do you think the paper has hit upon the true explanation of the mystery?"

"If we admit anything of it, sir," was the answer, "we can admit that. It is possible to produce such a state of seeming death."

"Then you are not ready to agree with me that in this very way they have overmatched me?"

"If I had not been the attending physician, Mr. Barremore, I might take stock in the story, but as it is I cannot."

Immediately the young doctor felt that he had said too much, but the words were out.

"What can you mean—what do you mean?" Mr. Barremore demanded.

"I hardly know what I mean," the doctor evaded.

"Then, why do you speak as you do? I am going to tell you, Mervyn, that I have had a damnable suspicion, but one which I do not for

a moment believe. I have had the suspicion that you may have helped the rascal to carry out his design."

Mervyn Lairdswal paled.

"You cannot have such an opinion of me," he gasped.

"Haven't I assured you that I do not credit the thought?" Mr. Barremore demanded. "Only for this article in the paper, I would not have thought of it. It was forced upon me. To be sure I do not believe that you had anything to do with it, but it is plain that some one had."

The young doctor groaned in spirit. If he only dared tell the truth of the matter. But, that, now, was out of the question.

"Loving your daughter as I did," reminded Mervyn, "and hating Herold Keenan as I do, it is not likely that I would aid him in carrying out his plans."

"That is true. On the other hand, it seems more likely that you would try to oppose him."

"I certainly would, had chance offered."

He dared go no nearer the point of danger. He did not dare to add: "And as chance did offer, as I certainly did."

"Still, you insist that you cannot take stock in this theory, as you express it," Mr. Barremore returned. "If not, you must hold some other view, and I would like to know what it is."

"Mr. Barremore," the doctor responded, "look at these facts: I saw Huldah die, and I know that on the second day after her death she was buried. How can you ask me to believe she is alive, until I have the evidence of sight to prove it?"

Mr. Barremore was greatly troubled. These things had been in his own mind. How could it be true? And yet, there must be something in the theory advanced. It was a fact not to be disputed that the clergyman had married a couple who gave their names as Herold Keenan and Huldah Barremore. Even with that evidence there might have been room for doubt, but the clergyman had, though too late, recognized the bride as the Huldah Barremore whose funeral he had preached on that same afternoon.

It was a puzzling matter, and it was enough to turn the brain of any one who tried to reason it out. It was beyond reason. It seemed to border upon the supernatural.

While they were discussing the question the postman arrived with letters, and Mr. Barremore seeing him, hastened to the door.

When he returned to the room he exclaimed:

"Ah-ha! see here; what better proof do you want than this? Here is a letter in Huldah's own hand."

He held it up for Mervyn to see. It was even so.

Hastily tearing it open, Mr. Barremore read aloud:

"SUNDAY, in New York.

"MY DEAR PAPA:—

"Will you ever forgive me? By the time this reaches you to-morrow, dear Herold and I will be on our way across the ocean. We are married, as perhaps you know by this time. Do not think of me as dead, for I assure you that I am very much alive. It was a desperate scheme, I know, and I tremble as I think of it; but Herold will tell you all about that. I can hardly bear the thought of going away without seeing you, but I would be afraid to meet you. As soon as you will forgive me, I will come back to you."

"With a daughter's love, HULDAH."

"There! what do you think of that?" Mr. Barremore thundered, as he finished.

"I know not what to think," Mervyn admitted. "See what Keenan has to say."

Mr. Barremore tore open another of the letters, and read as follows:

"SUNDAY, New York City.

"RESPECTED FATHER-IN-LAW:—

"Your daughter is now my wife. We played a desperate game, but it came out all right. Huldah was not dead, but only under the influence of a drug which I had provided her with. In her love for me she was willing to take the risk. As soon as it was dark on Saturday night I opened the grave and took her dear form out. The rest you know all about by this time. To-morrow we sail in the steamship Eustatia for Ireland. We will write you from there immediately upon our arrival. I hope, for Huldah's sake, that you will soon be willing to forgive her and me. I am not by any means a poor man, as my great-aunt will inform you, and it is my determination to make your daughter happy. If she is otherwise, the fault will lie with you. She sends you a brief note by this mail."

"Your son, HEROLD KEENAN."

No sooner had Mr. Barremore finished reading than Dr. Lairdswal snatched up his hat and rushed from the house. He dared not trust himself there a moment longer.

CHAPTER XVI.

LOOKING BACKWARD.

SOME weeks passed.

We will glance at them in a retrospective way, and proceed.

Mr. Barremore was convinced of the truth of the situation as set forth by Herold Keenan.

He had allowed the reporters to see the letters he had received, and the newspapers had come out with a flourish of trumpets—so to say, boasting of their astuteness in the theory they had advanced.

The story was generally believed, and the

events were now becoming stale as matter for gossip.

If there was one who doubted, it was Dr. Lairdshaw.

A great change had taken place in him. He had grown thin and pale, and was not like his former self at all. Sometimes he appeared to be absent-minded.

People were wondering at the change, many were beginning to distrust him, and his practice was beginning to drop off. The only explanation that he himself would offer was that he was not well.

Older physicians, Dr. Rippley, Dr. Woodcroft, and others, advised him to give up and go away for a time, but he refused to take their advice. He hoped that he would soon mend and regain his former health and strength. They shook their heads doubtfully, and insisted that he had better heed their warning.

There were only two persons who knew anything of the truth of the matter. These two were the doctor's mother and Mr. Barremore. To his mother he had told something of his love for Huldah, and to Mr. Barremore it needed no telling. But this was not the whole truth. The terrible doubts and fears that were preying upon his mind were the immediate cause of his decline.

Upon their arrival in Ireland, Herold Keenan had again written to Mr. Barremore, telling him that Huldah was very sick with a fever. The doctors, he said, were very doubtful about her recovery. He would write again, he closed by saying, the next steamer.

The next mail brought word that Huldah was improving slowly, and desired to return home, if her father would receive her.

Mr. Barremore, upon receipt of this, again sought the advice of Mervyn Lairdshaw.

The young doctor stuck to what he had advised before.

"Forgive her," he said, "and bring her home."

And so Mr. Barremore wrote:

"Bring my child home as soon as she is able to come, and I will receive her. Assure her that she is forgiven."

Other letters reported a relapse, followed by a steady improvement afterward, but the husband lamented the fact that his bride's mind was not what it had been. Her memory was about half gone, he informed the anxious father. It was the effect of the terrible fever that had almost resulted in her death.

Finally word came that they were about to return home. A note in Huldah's own hand inclosed in the letter assured her father that she was well again. Herold, however, stated that her mind was still somewhat unbalanced, so far as memory was concerned.

This was some seven weeks after the stirring events with which our story opens.

In the mean time, what of the strange case of Jeannette Bingham?

She had nearly regained her health, but her memory was a complete blank. She knew absolutely nothing of the past.

No mention of this case had appeared in the papers, as the police had kept it very quiet in the hope that by doing so they might have a better chance to arrive at the truth concerning it.

As soon as Mrs. Blossom informed them that the lost had been found, they took up the clew, expecting now that they could easily solve the mystery.

But they found their mistake.

At the hospital they learned where the body had come from. At the medical college, however, they found a stone wall in their way. The young woman had been brought there by an unknown person, who had hastened away immediately, they were informed; and there the trail abruptly ended. There was no clew to the identity of that unknown person.

Every person at the college who was questioned about it told the same story, and the truth of their statement could not be brought into question.

One point that puzzled them was to explain how the person who had left the girl at the college, if it was the same one who had afterward written the note to Mrs. Blossom, had ascertained that the patient had been removed to the hospital.

It was easily guessed that the person had watched the college, to learn whether the girl lived or died, and had seen her taken away in the ambulance; but that guess did not satisfy. They wanted the truth, and proof of it.

At the college the matter was still fresh in the minds of the four students, and especially in that of Buzbee.

After a few days he had called again at the residence of Mrs. Blossom, making inquiry as to whether Jeannette had been found or not, and of course received the information that she had.

Mrs. Blossom told him all she could about the matter, which was not much, and showed him the note she had received.

He exhibited the greatest interest, and expressed the hope that the mystery would soon be cleared away.

Making inquiry of the doctor who was attending the patient, he was told that the case was a

very mysterious one. There did not appear any way to account for the strange loss of memory. The idea of a long illness of fever, which might account for it, could not be entertained, since the girl had been absent from her home less than four days.

Dr. Rockabrown, who kept an eye upon the case, was as much puzzled as anybody. He could offer no explanation.

During the weeks that followed, Buzbee called several times at the house, and of course he kept his three chums posted.

Mrs. Blossom was more impressed with the strangeness of the case than any one else could be. Her mind was filled with interrogations all day, without any answer to any of them. Where had the girl been? What strange adventures had she passed through? Where were the clothes she had worn at the time of her disappearance? Whose were the ones she had on when found? Not a single article that she had worn at the time of her disappearance, had she brought back with her.

And her condition of mind was the most mysterious of all. She could not talk, and it was many days before she began to understand anything. She knew not the use of any article with which she had been familiar. Even knife and fork were strangers to her. As her health improved, however, she learned rapidly. She relearned her name, and would look up when spoken to, and at length began to pick up and make use of words. She was not demented, but was beginning life anew.

All of her friends had called to see her, but not one of them did she recognize. Even those with whom she had been the most intimate could not bring anything of the past to her memory. She learned their names, and began to greet them when they had made two or three calls, but to them it was like making the acquaintance of an entire stranger.

During these weeks the four students at the college had been anxiously awaiting the reappearance of Asher Toothwart. But he came not. It was a long absence for him, and they began to believe that he must have learned that the last body he had sold them had come to life.

His non-appearance, too, led them to believe that he was in some manner connected in what had been intended as a crime. Fearing the results, he did not dare to let himself be seen.

Perhaps, they reasoned, murder had been attempted, by gas or poison. When the girl was dead, as the murderer or murderers supposed, the body was clothed in a shroud purposely soiled with clay to make the deception perfect, and so sold to them in the usual way.

Such transactions were against the rules of the establishment with which they were connected, however, and it was possible that Dr. Rockabrown had taken a hand in the matter and warned Toothwart not to put in an appearance there again; and Toothwart, with a guilty conscience, was afraid to disobey.

Be the cause whatever it might, however, it was the fact none the less that the resurrectionist had not been seen since that night.

And so matters stood.

At Deedham the Keenan-Barremore affair was now looked upon as no mystery, as has been said.

It had been a bold and daring piece of business, but nothing more, and the newspapers having "worked it for all it was worth" and made all the capital out of it they could, had dropped it for events of more recent occurrence.

Mention of the matter was made occasionally, as Mr. Barremore heard from his unwelcome son-in-law and gave points of information to the public, but the case was no longer a "leader" in the journals.

Ray Rodman, the clergyman, had taken the same view of the matter as Mr. Barremore, after the revelations had been made, and while he could not understand the case to his satisfaction, yet he did not allow it long to trouble his mind.

He had performed his parts in the drama, parts that had been thrust upon him owing to the position he held, and if any blame attached anywhere it was not to him.

Naturally, he thought he was done with the affair, but such was not the case. He had more to do with it in the near future.

Old Margaret Keenan had heard from Herold as often as Mr. Barremore, and perhaps oftener. Certain it was that Herold's letters to her were longer and more elaborate than those he sent to Mr. Barremore.

In the latter, though, the son-in-law had put forth efforts to please, and in a measure had succeeded in doing so.

Mr. Barremore had come to the private conclusion that he might not prove to be so bad a fellow after all.

Finally, as has been mentioned, word was received that the runaway couple were about to return home, and the time of their departure from Queentown was given so that the time of their arrival could be estimated.

A day or two before the expected arrival, old Margaret Keenan sent word to Mr. Barremore that she desired to see him.

Mr. Barremore went to her.

It was her request that the young folks should

receive their first welcome in her house. She wanted to be present on the occasion, but owing to her age, did not want to venture out. She would have a royal feast, she declared, and would bear all the expenses—though that was of no moment; and it would be a joy to her such as she could not express.

And so it was arranged. Mr. Barremore had fully resolved to make the best of the situation, now that his daughter was actually married, and meant to let no act or word of his stand in the way of their happiness. On the contrary, he wanted to use his best influence for Herold Keenan's good, as Dr. Lairdshaw had suggested to him.

Finally the day of the prodigals' return was at hand.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE COMING HOME.

THE morning papers announced the arrival of the steamship Eustatia.

As it happened, Herold Keenan and his bride returned on the same vessel in which they had gone away.

About noon telegrams were received at Deedham by Mr. Barremore and old Margaret Keenan, giving the information that the couple might be expected to arrive there on the early evening train.

Everything was made ready for their reception, and the quaint old house of old Margaret was in a holiday trim and dress that must have surprised it and its neighbors, if they were capable of experiencing surprise at anything. Not in many a year had it known such a waking-up and shaking-up as this coming event had brought about.

The expected arrival had not been kept secret, and when the train was due on which the couple were coming, there was a great crowd at the station, drawn there more by curiosity than anything else.

Just before the train was due a carriage rolled up to the station, and Mr. Barremore was seen to get out.

Two or three reporters attacked him immediately, and, after responding to the inquiries they made, briefly but civilly, he made his way into the office to learn whether the train was on time.

It happened that it was a few minutes late, but those few minutes were soon gone and the train came thundering into the station.

As soon as it had stopped the crowd surged forward, and it required the efforts of two policemen to make room for the passengers.

In the crowd, but standing well back out of the way and in a deep shadow, was Dr. Lairdshaw.

He had on a slouch hat, and the collar of his coat was turned up as though he did not want to be recognized.

As soon as room had been made the passengers began to alight, and presently Herold Keenan came out of the door, followed closely by his pretty bride.

A cheer of welcome from the crowd greeted them.

Never had Herold looked better, and Huldah, in spite of what might have been expected, looked a picture of health.

Mr. Barremore was ready to receive them as they alighted, and as soon as Herold saw him he put out his hand, exclaiming:

"Mr. Barremore, I am—"

But he was suddenly interrupted.

"Oh! papa, papa!" cried Huldah; and she sprang forward and threw her arms around Mr. Barremore's neck, showering a dozen kisses upon his face.

"My child!" was the earnest response, and he embraced her in a way that spoke a full forgiveness.

"Come, the carriage is waiting," he said immediately, then; "let us get out of the crowd."

He led the way with Huldah leaning upon his arm, the crowd making room for them to pass but staring at the young bride with greatest curiosity; and Herold followed immediately behind, carrying their handbags, wraps, etc.

They were soon hid from view in the carriage, which started away immediately.

As soon as they had entered the carriage, Dr. Lairdshaw turned away from the scene.

His face was more pale and drawn than ever, his teeth were set hard, and his hands were clenched.

"It is a lie! a black, a damnable lie!" he grated, as soon as he was clear of the crowd. "That woman is not Huldah Barremore, and never was."

An almost groan escaped him.

"But how am I to prove it?" he asked himself.

"I dare not undertake to prove it. Would to God that I had died before that fatal day. This Huldah, the Huldah that I loved? Never! And yet—and yet, did she not greet Mr. Barremore with all the fervor of a daughter's love the instant she saw him? Can it be that I am mistaken? Have my fears made a madman of me? Oh! these awful doubts! this hell that rages within my overburdened breast!"

Any one who saw him just then might have been excused for thinking him mad. He was

waving his arms—or rather lifting them and dashing them down with force, and was muttering his thoughts more than half aloud.

"But how can it be?" he asked himself. "If I had not administered that drug with my own hand, and watched its effects, I could believe; but as it is—Yes, curse him! he lies! I know that I gave her a poison, and if she took another that was provided by him, as he claims, it would have resulted in her death. He lies, he lies! It is not Huldah! But I cannot prove it—I dare not try to prove it. And where is the body of the one I loved? What have they done with it? Oh! that I could reveal the truth of the situation, and prove it. But I can not—I dare not."

So ran his thoughts, as he muttered them half aloud, and so he made his way homeward.

In the mean time the carriage rattled on, and finally stopped at old Margaret's house.

On the way Herold had given an outline of everything, and had humbled himself into the dust in craving Mr. Barremore's forgiveness, which was freely granted.

With his beloved daughter's head resting upon his shoulder, the old gentleman felt again at peace with himself and all the world, and with the advice of Mervyn Lairdslaw fresh in mind, was willing to meet his son-in-law more than half-way.

Back of it all, however, was a keen pang of disappointment that his son-in-law was not the young doctor, whom he loved as a son indeed.

When the carriage stopped, footmen were on hand to do honor to the occasion, and another great crowd was encountered.

The party alighted and passed rapidly up the walk to the door, and were soon out of sight in the house.

Within, everything was light and splendor.

The great parlors, with their old-time furniture and appointments, had been opened and renovated, and old Margaret sat in a great, high-back chair like a queen on her throne.

Herold hastened forward and greeted her affectionately, and presented his bride, whom the old woman embraced and kissed, Huldah returning the caress in an earnest and tender manner.

"May the good saints bless both of you," the old lady invoked, when their first words of greeting had been exchanged. "And how well you are looking, darling," she added, looking steadily at Huldah; "no one would imagine that you have been so ill as you have."

"She has improved wonderfully," said Herold. "She gained rapidly as soon as she was able to get out of the house, and the return voyage has done her worlds of good. I have noticed her growing in health, strength and color by the hour, almost. If only her memory would fully return, she would be her old self."

Even as this was being said, Huldah was observed to press her hand to her forehead, as though to keep her thoughts from wandering, or to recall thoughts and ideas that were all but gone.

Many guests were present, and now they pressed forward to greet and congratulate the happy couple.

Some of them Huldah called by name as they came to her, greeting them warmly, but in some cases their names had to be spoken before she could recall the face.

But considering what had been said about her loss of memory, less was shown of it than might have been expected.

It was noticed, though, that every few moments the fair hand was pressed to her forehead, as though it required constant effort to keep her mind right.

When it was over, the aged hostess observed: "You must be exhausted, my dear."

"Not in body," responded Huldah, "but my head feels very weary. At times it seems as though everything were about to slip away from my memory, and it requires the greatest effort of my will to hold fast."

"Oh! that is too bad. I hope that you will soon be all right."

"And the doctors have assured us that she certainly will," spoke up Herold. "A few weeks, or at most a few months, amid familiar scenes and places, they say, will bring her mind all right again."

"I earnestly hope it will," said Mr. Barremore. "It is a wonder that she did not die, after passing through what she did. It was a foolhardy piece of business at best."

"I freely acknowledge that it was," owned Herold, "but it seemed our only plan, and we adopted it. You would never have consented to our marriage."

"That is true, true."

"And I was determined to have Huldah, no matter what the cost. But, it is all past now, and it is all well that ends well," 'tis said."

At the supper everything passed off finely, and no one present entertained for a moment the suspicion that was so firmly grounded in the mind of Dr. Lairdslaw.

There was no room for the suspicion.

It was true that Huldah did not recognize many persons whose faces ought to have been perfectly familiar to her, nor could she recall

incidents which ought to have held a place in her mind.

But all this was accounted for by her illness, and the ill effects the fever had had upon her mind.

Still, there was room for doubt in a mind so biased as that of Dr. Lairdslaw.

He would have held that this was but the natural acting of a person trying to play such a difficult role. He would have said that the loss of memory was but a cloak to cover a lack of knowledge.

On the other hand, however, how would he have explained the fact that Huldah had recognized her father at sight? and that she had called many of her friends by name as soon as they came where she was? And, too, there were some events of the past that she recalled that were but dimly remembered by those who had figured in them.

Two striking incidents that occurred during the evening ought to have satisfied the most skeptical.

The first was, when her father came and spoke to her once after supper. She looked at him wonderingly for an instant, and said:

"I crave your pardon, but if I have been introduced to you I have already forgotten your name. I have been very ill, and—"

"Why, Huldah, it is I—your father!" Mr. Barremore exclaimed.

She remembered immediately, then, and was much confused for some moments over so great a mistake.

Later on, she asked her husband if he had seen Mr. Keenan.

"Why, don't you know me?" he asked, taking her hands fondly.

Again she saw her mistake, and came to her right mind with a start. This time it was too much for her nerves, however, and she covered her face with her hands and wept. Seeing this, Mr. Barremore observed that he thought the excitement too great for her, so she was soon taken to her own home, and the guests departed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MERVYN LAIRDSLAW MEETS HULDAH.

ON the following morning the newspaper that had advanced the "buried alive" theory came out with a lengthy account of the reception.

The whole matter was gone over briefly, the paper again seizing the opportunity to boast of itself as a modern seer, and the home-coming and reception were graphically described.

All happiness and long life were wished for the happy couple who had risked so much, and the article closed by recommending Mr. Barremore to make up for his obstinate opposition in the past by his increased show of affection toward his daughter in the future, and a hearty conduct toward his worthy son-in-law.

And so the matter ended, so far as the newspapers and the public were concerned. The excitement was over, curiosity was gratified, and so it rested.

Days passed into weeks, and gradually the affair was dropped from the mind and laid by to be forgotten.

Huldah Barremore filled her old place, with the difference that she was now a married woman, and it could be noticed that gradually her memory was improving.

Up to this time Mervyn Lairdslaw had not met her.

Although Mr. Barremore had many times invited him, he had refused on every occasion to call at the house.

His excuse, though only hinted at, was understood well enough by Mr. Barremore, and he was not pressed very hard. Mr. Barremore looked upon it in the light that, loving Huldah as Mervyn did, he could not bear the thought of meeting her as the wife of another.

During this time the young doctor had not improved any in health or mental condition.

If anything, he was growing slowly but surely worse.

Not that he was mad or insane, but there was every fear of his becoming so, and he was running down in health, so that it was generally believed that his days were numbered.

His practice had fallen off fully one-half. He was at times so absent-minded that his patients grew afraid to trust him.

There was method in his madness, however, and if he had grown inattentive to his professional duties, it was because his thoughts were constantly turned into another channel.

There was no sharer of his secret, and of course no one could guess it. It was the awful preying upon his mind of that secret that was wearing him out. His nights were restless, and sometimes altogether sleepless. Whenever he slept his dreams were haunted by the dead face of Huldah Barremore, pointing an accusing finger at him, and during his waking hours he was none the less haunted by the awful question of doubt.

If he had not yet called at the Barremore residence, it was not because he did not intend to do so.

He was waiting for an opportunity such as he desired, and such as he knew was sure to come sooner or later.

At length it came.

He had been keeping a quiet observation of everything, and especially of the movements of Mr. Barremore and Herold Keenan.

Finally, one afternoon, he learned that Mr. Barremore was out of town somewhere, and knowing that Herold was in New York that day, he went boldly to the house and asked to see Mr. Barremore.

The servants knew him well, of course, and, of course, too, informed him that Mr. Barremore was not at home.

He asked then to see his daughter.

The request was carried to Huldah, and in a little time she came down to the parlor.

At sight of her Mervyn could hardly restrain the impulse he suddenly felt to exclaim her name. Never had he seen her looking more pretty or more charming. In a single moment, however, it passed, for as she came nearer he recognized a certain something in her manner that did not belong to the Huldah he had known and loved.

Even there and then he questioned himself in the never-ending manner. Was he mistaken after all? Was this really Huldah? Had his fears and remorse disturbed his reason?

Huldah greeted him with a slight bow, but without any sign of recognition, and he said:

"I am informed that Mr. Barremore is not at home, as it was him I asked for, but really my call was intended for you. I—"

"For me?" with some surprise.

"Yes; you remember me, do you not?"

"I am afraid that I do not," was the response, and her hand went to her forehead; "but it is nothing strange, for my memory has been playing me all sorts of tricks since my severe sickness."

"So I have heard, but it may be that some change in me has something to do with it. I am the doctor who attended you, and who was at your side when you died. I am Mervyn Lairdslaw."

The young woman's face paled for just a second, and then it flushed.

"Oh, yes, I believe I remember you now, slightly," she said, "but it all is so like a dream that I am hardly sure of anything."

"I suppose not. Well, I have called, though I have been rather tardy about doing it, to congratulate you upon your return to life, and upon your happy marriage, your recovery from your severe illness, and your safe return home."

"For all of which I sincerely thank you," the young wife returned.

"If you will permit me to speak of it, I must remark that it was a terrible risk you ran, in allowing yourself to be buried alive."

He saw a slight shudder pass over the young woman's form.

"Yes, it was, indeed," she admitted, "but love dares anything, you know."

"So I have heard. Will you allow me to ask what is the last you remember before you fell into your trance-like state?"

"I remembered everything before my severe illness, but now it is all blurred in my mind. I faintly recall taking the powder, however, as you have read in the papers, no doubt."

"You remember that, eh?"

"Yes, faintly."

"Of course you had been shamming illness up to that time."

"Not altogether. I was slightly sick during the first part of the week."

"And when did you take the powder that made you seem as dead?"

"It was late on that Thursday afternoon. Let me see, I believe the doctor had just called—was it you?—and had prepared something for me to take. There were several glasses on the table, as you may remember. After you had prepared the medicine you turned away for a moment for something, and I quickly reached out and exchanged the glasses, substituting the one in which I had prepared the powder. Herold had sent me. When I took the medicine it was not yours, but—Oh, sir! what is the matter? Are you ill?"

Mervyn Lairdslaw felt his brain swim, and knew that he was on the point of fainting, but her sudden exclamation recalled him, and by a great effort he managed to recover, after a few moments.

"It—it is nothing," he said; "I have been almost ill of late, and am weak. It will pass off in a few moments."

"You really frightened me," Huldah declared.

"I thought you were going to faint."

"Perhaps I did come near it, for I felt very strange. Did you finish what you were saying?"

"I guess I did, but really I have forgotten what we were talking about, for you frightened it out of my mind. Can you remind me what it was?"

Dr. Lairdslaw felt that there could be no acting about this. It was indeed Huldah, and he had had all his trouble of mind for nothing. What she had said about taking the medicine explained it all. She had not taken his preparation at all, but the drug that had been furnished by her lover.

"It was your response to something that I asked," he said. "No matter. You have no recollection of me, then?"

"The more I see of you the more I think I

used to know you quite well," was the answer. "I think you used to be a great friend of papa's, did you not?"

"Your father certainly honored me with his esteem and friendship for some time," was the response.

"Yes, I begin to remember you. Oh!" pressing her hand to her head wearily, "you have no idea how very trying this is to me, to meet those whom I used to know, and not be able to recognize them. Do you think that my memory will fully return to me?"

"It may, in time," was the response.

Again had appeared that certain something that seemed to say that this could not be the Huldah he had known before, the Huldah he had loved. Again rose the doubt in his mind. But it was shortlived. As soon as he recalled what she had said about the exchange of the glasses on that fatal Thursday afternoon, all room for doubt seemed to be taken away.

"And you believe that everything of the past will gradually return to my mind, and that I shall really be my own self again?" she further interrogated.

"I think so," was the response to that.

"You will pardon my mentioning it," she further observed, "but it occurs to me now that I used to know you quite well. Is this so?"

"We were once quite good friends, I believe," Mervyn assured.

"Can you not remind me of something of the past that may serve to give my memory a new hold upon it?"

"Under present circumstances I do not feel that I can," Mervyn answered, as he rose to go. "In some respects, perhaps, it were better for you if your memory never returns."

"You are going?"

"Yes. Kindly remember me to your father, and say that I will call again. I will take my leave."

Huldah rose and offered her hand.

"I know that you are one of papa's friends," she remarked, "and I shall be glad to have you call again. Perhaps on the next occasion my husband and he will be at home."

Mervyn got away as soon as he could.

He felt that he was choking, and he wanted to get out into the open air. He was more at ease pacing the streets of late than anywhere else.

As he turned his steps homeward, his mind was in a strange state of commingled doubt, conviction, wonder, and other emotions. Was the great question settled at last? Now that he recalled it, there had been every opportunity for such an exchange of glasses as the young woman declared she had made. Truly, their story must be true, and this really Huldah—the Huldah he had loved. Indeed, how was there any room for him to doubt? Did Nature ever make two faces so nearly alike? He could not answer the great problem to his satisfaction, but from the sense of ease he felt in mind, he was aware that now he was impressed with the truth that Huldah Barremore was alive, though lost forever to him.

CHAPTER XIX.

ANOTHER PERSON DOUBTS.

WHEN Mervyn Lairdslaw reached home he found a note awaiting him.

It was in a woman's hand, and one that he did not recognize at first.

He spent no time in idle speculation, but tore open the envelope immediately and read the contents.

The missive ran as follows:

"DR. LAIRDSLAW:—

"I desire to see you for the purpose of a little conversation upon a subject of a very delicate nature. Will you do me the favor to call upon me, not professionally, at any time that may be convenient? I have something on my mind that I must make known to some one, and you are the only person whom I dare trust in the matter.

"Yours truly,

"GUENVER WESTERVALL."

The doctor folded the letter up and returned it to its envelope in a thoughtful manner, and sat down to think.

What meant such a message from Guenver Westervall?

Guenver Westervall was an unmarried lady of twenty-eight. She lived with her widowed mother in a quiet part of the city, in their own house, and they were in comfortable circumstances, but not wealthy.

She was the daughter of a clergyman, her mother was a devout Christian woman, and she herself was the same.

Guenver had been one of Huldah Barremore's most intimate friends.

The two had been almost constant companions, but since Huldah's return from across the ocean there had come a certain strangeness between them.

Guenver had made every allowance for Huldah's blighted memory, but beyond and beneath that there was a certain something that had gradually repelled the gentle-souled Guenver.

"What can she want to see me for?" Dr. Lairdslaw questioned. "What subject of a delicate nature, and not professional, does she

want to discuss with me? What can she have on her mind, that she dare trust to no one but me?"

He found no answers to the interrogations, at first, but presently, as he reflected that Guenver and Huldah had been close friends, he thought that perhaps it might be something in regard to that case.

On first thought he had decided to put the call off till evening, but when this came to his mind he concluded to go at once.

In a short time he was at Mrs. Westervall's home.

He asked for Guenver, and was shown into the parlor.

In a few moments Guenver appeared.

She was a tall, stately-looking girl, not particularly handsome, but with a face that was full of purity and goodness in its expression. Her hair and eyes were black, and her features, clear cut, bore the stamp of decision of character.

She was slender, but yet rounded and superbly outlined in her neat and pretty house dress, and her movements were full of easy grace.

"You have responded quickly to my note," she observed, as she advanced and offered her hand frankly.

"I was at leisure," the doctor responded, "and thought I would come immediately."

He arose and shook hands with her as he spoke.

"And I am glad that you have done so," the lady said, "for now that I have fully decided to make mention of a certain thing to you, I want to have it over with, and so ease my mind. Sit down, and we will talk."

Mervyn resumed his seat, and the lady continued:

"What I have to say is concerning Huldah Barremore."

"I thought that it might be," the doctor owned.

"What led you to think that?"

"I know that you and she were such good friends, and, as I will confess, thoughts of her have been on my mind for a long time."

"I thought as much. You will pardon me, Mervyn, but what I must say must be said boldly. I know that you loved Huldah."

Mervyn Lairdslaw and Guenver Westervall had been playmates at school, and had ever since called each other by their given names, when not in the company of others.

"Yes, I loved her—loved her devotedly," Mervyn owned.

"I was aware of it, and that is the reason I have sent for you instead of making my suspicion known to any other."

The doctor almost trembled in his excitement. What could be coming?

Did she suspect?

"You may speak plainly—freely," he said.

"I will do so. First, however, there are some questions I would like to ask you?"

"Ask them."

"You remember how very ill Huldah was reported to be in Ireland?"

"I do."

"Well, was it possible for any one to regain so quickly as to look as full of health as she did upon her return?"

"It is, under such circumstances as have been described in this case."

The young doctor was all on fire to know what was coming, but he gave the answer in a calm and steady tone.

"It does not look reasonable to me," Guenver confessed, "but since you say it is possible, I accept it. Now another: Is it possible for such an illness to change the color of a person's eyes?"

"I never heard of such a case."

"Good. And now again: Would such an illness change a person's general disposition, making a noble, generous mind to become an ignoble and selfish one?"

"It is not likely that it would, unless the mind were distorted so as to produce such results."

"Do you think that Mrs. Keenan's mind is sufficiently disordered?"

"I have met her only once since her return, and cannot say, speaking with any degree of certainty."

"You do not consider her insane, do you?"

"Not at all."

"Neither do I. She is rational enough. There is something very peculiar about her lack of memory, however."

"In what way do you mean?"

"You remember how intimate she was with me, and what good friends we were."

"Yes."

"Does it look reasonable that she should so entirely forget me, when she can recall some others whom she did not know half so well?"

"I must admit that it does not."

"So I thought."

"But what are you coming at, Guenver?" Mervyn asked.

Well enough he knew, now, but he did not want it to appear yet.

"One or two more questions, and then I will tell you."

"Very well, let me hear them."

"Do you believe that Huldah Barremore could

have been buried, and afterward brought to life, as is claimed?"

"Yes, it is possible."

"Do you know of any such case?"

"I have read of them."

"Well, admitting all that, then, would she have the strength to carry out the part she afterward played?"

"It does not seem possible that she could have, but it appears that she *did* have," Mervyn answered.

"I do not believe it."

"What!" in pretended great surprise, "you do not believe it?"

"I do not."

"Then you think—"

"I think the present Mrs. Keenan is not Huldah at all."

"What are the grounds of your disbelief?"

It was hard for the doctor to appear calm, but he made every effort to do so. He wanted to know Guenver's mind before he stated any thoughts of his own.

"Well, the points are these: It does not look reasonable to me, as I have said, that she could recover so soon and so completely from so severe an illness. Then again, the eyes of this woman are not of the same color as those of the Huldah we knew. They are of very nearly the same shade, but I can detect a difference. This woman's nature is selfish and devoid of the generous impulses which characterized Huldah Barremore. And last but not least, as we sometimes read, all the little secrets and confidences which Huldah and I held in common are entirely unknown to this person."

"Your argument is certainly strong," Mervyn admitted; "but if this be not Huldah, where is her body?"

"I cannot answer that. It must have been disposed of."

"But, look at this: Where, in so short a time, could Herold Keenan find a person looking so very much like Huldah, and one, too, who would undertake to play such a part?"

"That is one point that troubles me greatly, and which leads me to doubt the truth of my suspicion," Guenver admitted.

"And there are many more such points, too," Mervyn went on, and he ran them all over in review.

It did not seem that there was any room for doubt.

"On the other hand," the doctor continued, "are proofs to support the belief you hold."

He advanced them, then, for he had them all in mind, arranged and classified, if so it may be said.

When he had done, finally, the lady's mind was in a state of perplexity. She had doubts and beliefs in both directions.

"Now that you have given me the arguments, pro and con," she presently spoke, "which do you believe?"

"Not two hours ago," Mervyn answered, "I believed as you suspect. I called on Mrs. Keenan, and when I came away I felt more convinced that she must be indeed the Huldah I had loved. Now, however, there is more doubt in my mind than ever, and I am convinced that your suspicion is correct. This woman is not Huldah Barremore."

"I was almost sure that you thought so," cried the lady. "I know that something has been preying upon your mind. Now, how are we to prove the matter, and so settle it for good and all?"

"That is something that will require much thought and careful deliberation," Mervyn answered. "Suppose we both study the matter carefully for a day or two, and I will call again then, and we will have another talk about it."

This was agreed to, and in about half an hour, after further discussing the subject from almost every point, Mervyn took his leave. He was glad to know that there was at least one other who shared his suspicion that the truth was not yet fully known.

CHAPTER XX.

A CONVERTED MAN'S ASSERTION.

A SERIES of revival meetings was in progress in the North End Church.

Rev. Ruy Rodman was one of those capable, vigorous men, full of divine love for the Master they serve, and "all on fire" for the glorious cause they uphold.

His labors in these meetings had been signally rewarded, and success had crowned his every effort. Many of the most vile and degraded men and women of that neighborhood had been brought to a sense of their condition, and led to cry aloud for mercy; and the young clergyman, having pointed out to them the Christ, meant to stand by them as their true friend, and put forth every effort to lift them up into good and useful members of society.

His arguments were all plain and straightforward, without superfluity of language, and such as all who heard could understand. His manner was full of impressive earnestness, without a suggestion of fanaticism, and he showed favor to none. He called every man brother, and his preaching was as much by example as by precept. No one who came to him for help or advice, was turned away empty.

People came from all parts of the city to hear him, and the church was crowded nightly. Many who came there out of pure idle curiosity, went away with lighter hearts and clearer consciences, and with brighter views and hopes of life, here and hereafter, than they had ever known before.

One night, after the close of a meeting that had been one of the best of the series, there came a ring at the bell of the parsonage.

The young clergyman was in his study and the housekeeper went to the door.

When she opened it she was startled at sight of the man before her. He was a decidedly hard-looking customer. He was roughly dressed, his face was covered with a four weeks' growth of harsh beard, and his limp slouch hat made him look like a typical villain.

"Kin I see ther parson, ma'am?" he asked.

"Eight?" Anastasia Budd interrogated.

"I want ter see ther parson," the man announced.

"What is your name, and what do you want to see him for?" the housekeeper questioned.

"My name is Mike Burke," the man answered, "an' I want ter git my soul insured."

"Eight?"

"I say my name is Mike Burke, an' I want ter git some pints about this here gospel plan. I've been a hard case, ma'am, but I dropped in ter th' meetin' ter-night, an' I am all broke up. Jest tell th' parson that he's hurt me deep, an' I want him ter help me out. It is now or never with Mike Burke, ma'am. Ther question of hell or heaven has got ter be settled now or never."

"Poor man!" the housekeeper sighed, "just wait here and I'll tell him."

"All right, ma'am; an' you needn't be afeerd o' my liftin' anything an' skinnin' out with it, fer all that has been taken clean out of me."

"Eight?"

"I said all right, an' you needn't be afeerd ter trust Mike Burke now. He is a new critter, he is, clean through an' through."

"I am glad to hear that."

The housekeeper went up-stairs and tapped at the door of the study.

Having heard the bell, of course, the clergyman was expecting her, and opened the door immediately.

"There is a rough-looking man down there who wants to see you about his soul, Mr. Rodman," Anastasia announced. "He says his name is Mike Burke, and that he was at the meeting to-night."

"Very well, show him right up."

"Eight?"

"Show him up."

The housekeeper turned away to do as directed, and in a few moments the man was shown into the study.

"Come right in, my brother," the clergyman exclaimed, getting up and offering his hand.

The man gave his hand in a half-hearted way, saying:

"Don't call me yer brother, mister, fer ye will be 'shamed o' me if ye do. I am a hard sinner, I am, an' it would disgrace ye ter reckonize th' likes o' me on ther street!"

"Oh, would it? I don't think so. You just speak to me next time you see me on the street, and see if it will. Sit right down now, and we will have a talk. What do you want to see me about?"

The fellow sat down rather uneasily, and explained:

"I was at your meetin' ter-night, an' what you said bit me hard. You looked right at me an' told everybody that God had sent me a special invite ter come ter heaven, an' I wouldn't 'cept it. You made me think about my poor old mammy what's dead an' gone, an' th' words she used ter say ter me, an' when you axed me why I wouldn't repent an' be saved, it broke me all up. Mebby you noticed me git up an' go out. Well, I did, an' I went out in ther graveyard there, an' found mammy's grave, an' there I've been ever since, blubberin' like any big booby. Now I want ter ax ye, fair an' square, if ye think there is any chance fer me?"

"A chance for you?" the clergyman exclaimed; "there is the biggest kind of a chance for you."

"But I have been a hard case, sir; I have been guilty of everything but murder, I guess."

"I care nothing for that, there is hope for you."

The clergyman went on, then, explaining the great mystery briefly but clearly, and in a little time the rough, hardened man, was melted to tears.

"I see it all now," he declared, "but there ain't no hope fer me. I've done so much badness that I can't never do enough good ter cover it."

"You do not see it clearly yet," Ruy contradicted. "No payment of that kind is required of you. Suppose you owed a man ten thousand dollars, and had not a dollar in the world to pay. It would look like a hopeless task to think of paying it, would it not? But suppose a rich man comes along and gives you enough money to set you free from debt, gives it to you, you understand; would you still trouble your mind about paying a debt that was already paid?"

"Well, no, hardly," the man said, a new light dawning upon him.

"Just so it is in this case. You are a debtor to God, with no means of paying. Right here is a good Friend, however, who assures you that he has paid the debt for you, and all that is necessary is for you to believe it, and 'sin no more."

An hour was spent in this way, and when finally Mike Burke departed he was a new man.

Early next morning, however, he called at the parsonage again, now more full of trouble than ever.

"What is it now, brother?" asked the clergyman.

"It is all right but one thing," the man declared.

"And what is that one thing?"

"I have got somethin' on my mind that I have got to make known to somebody. I won't git no rest till I do."

"Well, why not take it to your great Friend and tell him about it?"

"I have, but it ain't no use. It is somethin' that has got ter be set right, an' I'm goin' ter set it right if it sends me ter prison."

"I am glad to see you in such an earnest frame of mind. If there is anything in the past that you have done amiss, and you can make it right, you ought to do so."

"I know it, an' I've got ter do it. Ther trouble is, I don't know how ter begin."

"If I can help you any I will gladly do it."

"I believe that, and that is th' reason I have come to you. Besides, you had a hand in this affair, too, as well as me, though there was nothin' wrong in what you done in it."

"You say that I am concerned in it? Go ahead and let me know all about it."

"Do you remember a big shower that kem up one evenin' along in th' fore part of th' summer, when it rained fer about a hour as hard as it could, with th' worst thunder an' lightning ever seen?"

"I think I do; but, why do you ask this?"

"It was th' night that a couple kem here ter git spliced."

"Yes, I remember it well."

"I thought you would. Of course you know all about that couple now, an' th' fuss that th' papers made about that gal's bein' taken from th' grave alive, an' all th' rest of it."

"Yes, yes, it is fresh in my mind. What do you know about it?"

"I know a good deal about it, an' it is that that troubles me. There is no other thing in th' past that I have done that I kin make right now, but this one thing kin be made right, I believe, an' I want you to help me ter do it. I don't keer, as I said, if it sends me up fer th' rest of my days."

"It may not result in that way."

"I don't keer whether it does or not. You see I have got all th' paper clippin's about th' matter," and he drew from his pocket the different articles that had appeared from time to time in relation to the Keenan-Barremore affair.

The young clergyman was now decidedly interested.

What did this man know about that mysterious occurrence?

"I see it is the Barremore matter that you are interested in," the clergyman observed.

"Yes, that's it," the man owned.

"And how are you concerned in it? Are you one of the men who came here that same night and obliged me to show where Miss Barremore was buried?"

"No, sir, I ain't; I don't know nothin' about that part of it."

"Please go ahead, then, and tell me your story."

"I'll do it, but I'd like ter ax a question or two first."

"Very well; ask them."

"You see here in ther paper it says that you married that couple right in th' hardest of the storm."

"Yes, so I did."

"An' it says that both th' man an' th' woman was wet through."

"They were."

"Be you sure on them pints?"

"Of course I am."

"An' no chance fer doubt?"

"Not the least. My housekeeper will tell you the same."

"Oh, I don't doubt yer word, not a bit; but I want ter be sartin sure of it. It is them pints that has been troublin' me all along. If you married that couple durin' th' rain, an' they was both wet—or whether they was or not, then th' woman that you married wasn't Huldah Barremore, for she wasn't yet out of the grave, an' that I'm willin' ter swear to."

The young clergyman looked upon the man with greatest amazement.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DOMINIE DETECTIVE.

FOR some moments neither spoke.

The clergyman was the first to do so.

"Are you aware that this is a serious assertion which you make?" he asked.

"I know it is," declared the man, "but it is

th' fack none th' less. If you married that man an' woman durin' th' storm, then it wasn't Huldah Barremore no more than th' man was me."

"But," Ruy demanded, "how do you know it was not?"

"Jest in th' way I've told ye. She wasn't out of th' grave yet."

"Are you prepared to prove this?"

"There, now ye have got me. I can't prove it, unless I kin find a sartin man what's a stranger to me, an' it ain't likely that I kin. Besides, mebbe he'd go back on it if I did find him. No, I can't prove it."

"And what had that man to do with it?"

"He is th' feller what dug th' body up, with my help, an' took it away."

"Oh, now I begin to see into it. It was after the storm, then, that the body was taken out of the grave."

"It was; and you kin add to that that th' gal was stone dead, too."

"What was the body taken up for?"

"You ask me too much ag'in. I should reckon that it was ter carry out th' plot that seems ter be goin' on, though, accordin' ter th' account in th' papers."

"You think, then, that some one is passing herself off as Miss Barremore, or as it is now—Mrs. Keenan?"

"That is it exactly."

"But, how is it possible? I recognized the woman I married as the same one whose funeral I had preached that afternoon."

"I can't help that, with all respect to you, sir; but if you married 'em in that shower, it is a fact as plain as kin be that it wasn't th' Barremore gal. She was in th' grave till after that shower was over, for I know it."

"Well, it is strange, certainly. How came you to be one of the men interested in taking the body up?"

"I will tell ye all about it, sence I've determined ter take a clean sweep of th' old record and begin a new one. What I tell, too, will be as true as preachin', every word."

"I believe you. Go ahead with your story."

The clergyman leaned back in his chair, and the newly converted man began his narration.

"Ye see," he commenced, "I had been over to Wellsford that day, and was comin' home afoot, alone early in th' evenin', an' was about half way here, when a wagon overtook me an' I axed th' driver if he'd give me a lift. You know where Wellsford is, of course."

"Certainly; it is about twelve miles from here, toward New York."

"Yes, that's about th' distance, an' you see I had about six miles to come when I was overtaken by th' wagon. Well, th' driver stopped an' looked at me afore he answered, an' when he had sized me up he said he guessed he could, an' told me ter git in. I done so, an' we started on."

"Where be you goin'?" sez th' stranger.

"To Deedham," sez I.

"To Deedham, eh," sez he; "that's where I'm goin' myself."

"All th' better fer me, then," sez I; "an' so we fell to talkin'."

"He seemed like a good sort of feller, an' gradually we kem ter onderstand each other pooty well. He told things on his side, an' I told things on my side, and we hadn't gone many miles afore we both knowed that we wasn't no angels."

"Finally th' talk turned to graveyards, an' he asked in a off-hand way if I had ever visited 'em at night. I wunked at him an' told him I had sometimes. Then he wunked back an' said he had too, an' that he had expected ter visit one that night."

"An' so it went on till he had sounded me pooty deep, an' then he kem out an' axed me if I didn't want ter help him in a job."

"Of course I wanted ter know what was in it, and when he said he'd give me five dollars I took him up."

"Well, ter come right to th' pint, he drove on ter Deedham here, turned this corner by your house, an' so on and down behind th' wall at th' rear of th' graveyard, where he tied his hoss an' we got out."

"It was dark by that time, an' that shower was a-comin' up pooty fast. We didn't waste no time. He jerked some pickets loose from th' fence an' we went in, an' he seemed ter know th' way he wanted ter go. He told me later on that th' way had been explained to him, and that the grave was marked so as he'd make no mistake. That made me wonder who th' dead one could be, an' I axed him, but I couldn't git nothin' out of him. Next day, though, when th' diskivry was made that th' body was gone, then I larned whose it was."

The young clergyman did not interrupt, though he was rather impatient to hear it all, for he thought he would get at it sooner by allowing the man to tell it in his own way.

"Well," the reformed rascal went on, "we set to work right away, for he had brought along a couple o' spades, but we hadn't done much when th' big drops o' rain begun ter fall an' we had ter stop. We stuck up our spades in th' grave, an' th' other feller hung a spread over 'em so as ter keep out th' water, an' then

we went an' laid close under th' stone wall till th' rain was over.

"Now, that shower wasn't no short one, as you know, an' we had ter lay right there fer some time. When it was over, though—an' not until it was over, either, mind ye—then we went to work ag'in, an' dug that grave open an' took th' body out. An' now that is how I know that it couldn't be that woman that you married, if they was married while th' storm lasted. You kin see how it is yerself."

Ruy Rodman knew not what to make of so strange a tale.

It went to cast more mystery than ever around the events of that Saturday night.

"What was done with that body?" he asked.

"Th' other feller took it off with him," the man declared.

"And is that all you know about it?"

"That is all, sir. I got my five dollars, and as soon as he was gone, after we had filled up the hole, I went home an' ter bed."

"It is a very strange case."

"That's what I say, too, an' it is one that I want ter see set straight. It is plain ter be seen that there is somethin' goin' on that ain't right."

"But what is going to be done about it, since you have no proof for what you say?" the clergyman questioned.

"That is the sticker. I want you to help me out with it. I am willin' ter stand by my share in th' bad business, an' ter take whatever comes of it, so I don't ax ye ter keep it still. I want it ter come out."

"Yes, I know; but here is work for a detective to do, and I really do not know who is the proper person to trust with the secret."

"No, ner me, fer it has got ter be some one what will see it through to th' end."

"I would say that the young lady's father would be the proper person for you to go to, Mr. Burke, but I have noticed in the paper that he has accepted the situation as all right, and that his daughter and son-in-law are living with him. He would never believe you, and besides, it would put that man Keenan on his guard, if he is playing a falsehood."

"That's why I kem to you first, 'cause I didn't know how ter go ter work ter make it known."

"Then you have not mentioned it to any one else?"

"Not to a livin' soul, sir."

"Good. Well, how does your conscience feel now, since you have freed your mind in this matter?"

"I feel like a new bein', an' that is true. All th' old load is off now, an' I feel that I kin take a new start with th' world."

"Good! I am glad to hear that. Keep to your resolve, look to the Master for help, and all will be well with you."

"Thank 'e fer them words."

"Now, Mr. Burke, I would like to ask some questions."

"Fire right ahead."

"Did you learn that man's name?"

"No, I didn't."

"Did you learn where he was from, or where he belonged?"

"He belonged at Wellsford, he told me, an' I guess it's straight."

"Would you know him if you were to see him again?"

"Yes, to be sure I would."

"Good. Now, as you are in earnest in your desire to see this matter made right, how would you like to play detective and find out that man's name, and where he lives?"

"Nothin' would suit me better."

"And will you do it?"

"I will, an' be glad ter do it."

"Very well, do so, and when you have got the information needed, let me know. I do not know of any one in whom to confide in this matter, so I will undertake to look into it myself."

"I'll begin right at once. I'll know that boss an' wagon, if I kin see it, an' I'll go over ter Wellsford, an' keep my eyes open fer 'em."

"Very well."

"An' as soon as I sight 'em I'll let ye know."

"All right, and do not forget your new resolves, Mr. Burke. If you need any help or advice, come right to me and I will do all I can for you."

"I'll not forget, sir, an' I'll not forget you. If there was more men like you in th' world, there'd be less like me."

After some further exchange of words, Mike Burke went away, leaving the young clergyman to ponder over the revelation he had made.

"It is a very mysterious affair," he mused.

"It is plain that this man is thoroughly in earnest in what he has confessed, and I have no doubt about the truth of his story. But, how can it be that a deception of this sort can be played upon Mr. Barremore? It is more than I can understand."

"I thought and hoped that I was done with the affair, but it seems that I am not. If this man's story is true, and I can see no reason to doubt it, then a wrong has been done that must be made right. But, I must be sure of my ground before I make anything of this known to any one. I must take upon myself a little detective work, a rather novel departure for a

minister of the gospel, but in such a case as this I can see no other way.

"At all events, I must wait until I hear again from this Mike Burke. I have reason to believe that his conversion is genuine, and that he will do all he can to set right what he believes to be a great wrong. What will be the outcome of it all? I confess that I am filled with curiosity concerning it. I wonder whether any one has a suspicion that all is not as it should be? I wish I could meet some one who used to know Miss Barremore well, and make some careful inquiries. I believe I will talk with Doctor Lairdshaw the first time I meet him."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE WORKING OF PROVIDENCE.

CLERGYMEN'S sons are not always models of virtue and goodness.

A case in point was that of Stedman Westervall, son of Carleton Westervall, and a brother to the Guenver whose acquaintance we have made.

Stedman was three years younger than Guenver, and as wild a young man as the city of Deedham could show.

A father's last words of admonition, a mother's tears and prayers, and a sister's loving influence, all were nothing to him. He drank, gambled, was fond of fast company, and was a young reprobate and scapegrace generally.

It were more proper, however, to say such he had been, for within a day or two a great change had come over him.

For forty-eight hours he had not been out of the house, had eat little or nothing during that time, and his mother and sister were greatly concerned about him. Still he declared that he was not sick.

On this morning, about the time of the interview between Ruy Rodman and Mike Burke, Guenver Westervall entered her mother's room hastily, her face wearing an expression of commingled surprise, excitement and gladness.

"What has happened?" the mother quickly asked.

"You cannot guess," was the excited response.

"No, I am sure I cannot guess; tell me."

"Our prayers have been answered at last, mother; for Stedman is converted. It is this that has kept him at home for two whole days and nights."

"God be praised!" Mrs. Westervall cried.

"Isn't it good news?"

"It is almost too good to be true," the mother declared. "How do you know it is so? Has he told you?"

"No, but he is praying in his room, and it sounds so much like papa that I was frightened when I heard him, and stopped to listen. Oh! it is true, mother; it is true indeed!"

The mother and daughter clasped hands, and without a word further they knelt and offered prayers of thanksgiving for the blessing that had come to them.

Just as they rose there came a knock at the door.

"Come," Mrs. Westervall invited.

The door opened and Stedman stepped into the room.

He was a tall, finely-formed young man, but was somewhat pale and careworn in appearance, and bore the stamp of dissipation. On this occasion, however, his face was brightened by a new light that was in his eyes.

Springing forward, he caught his mother in his arms, but he could not speak, and the three gave way to tears.

The scene that followed is too sacred to be set forth in detail.

When they had somewhat regained their composure, Mrs. Westervall asked:

"But, Stedman, how did this come about?"

"It came of my scoffing," the young man answered. "A party of us were over at North End the other night, and as we were passing the church there I suggested that we should go in and see the 'performance,' as I irreverently expressed it. The others agreed, and we went in. No sooner had I entered the door than I received a shock that almost unnerved me, for the clergyman in charge looked so much like father, at first glance, that I almost thought it was he. But that was not all. Just as I entered he was saying, and in a voice that was strangely like father's, too: 'Oh! my son, my son! give heed to my counsel!'"

"Those were father's last words to me, and they stung my soul like fiery darts. Again I was a boy of ten, sitting by your side in the old church, and it was father in the pulpit. Every word that was uttered seemed to be directed at me especially. I was overcome. I was melted to tears, and the companions whom I had led into that sacred place, seeing my condition, slunk away and left me there alone. What followed is like a dream. I found myself at the altar, completely broken down, and when I came away I was a new creature."

"And now, mother mine, the past is dead and buried, and from this hour I intend to follow in my father's footsteps."

"What! do you intend to preach?"

"With God's help, yes."

"May he grant it."

"I have cut loose forever from my associates, and shall begin preparations immediately. I have the education, but I lack the training, and I need advice. I desire a favor of you, Guenver," turning to his sister.

"What is it, Stedman?"

"I want you to go to that clergyman and request him to come and see me."

"Why do you not go to his house?"

"Because I do not want to see any of my old companions, and I might meet them on the way."

The situation was understood immediately, and Mrs. Westervall gave Guenver a signal that she should go as requested.

"Very well, I will do it," the young lady promised.

"I thought you would. You may go as soon as you please."

"I will go as soon as I can get ready."

An hour later found Guenver Westervall at Ruy Rodman's door.

"Is the clergyman in?" she inquired.

"Eigh!" said the housekeeper.

"Is the clergyman in?"

"Yes, he is in."

"I desire to see him, if I may."

"Eigh?" again.

"I say I would like to see him."

"Very well, step right into the parlor, please, and I will call him down. He is in his study."

Guenver entered the parlor, amused at the woman's peculiar deafness and wondering whether she could be the clergyman's mother, and the housekeeper went to announce her presence.

In a few minutes the young clergyman entered the room.

As his eyes fell upon his visitor he experienced a sudden emotion that was new to him. He felt strangely drawn toward her, and it seemed as though an angel of light had come into his house.

It was the same with Guenver. She admired and liked the handsome young clergyman immediately, and it seemed like meeting a long-absent friend. She felt the blood quicken in her veins as their eyes met.

There was a momentary pause, and then Ruy bowed and interrogated:

"You desire to see me?"

"You are Mr. Rodman the clergyman?" Guenver counter-questioned.

"I am he," Ruy assured.

"Yes, I desire to see you, sir," the young lady then went on to say, and she told briefly who she was and stated the business that brought her there.

"I am glad to hear the good news you bring," the clergyman declared, his face all aglow with genuine pleasure, "and I will call upon your brother at any time that is convenient for him."

"He would like to see you as soon as you can spare the time to call."

"Well, I can go now as well as any time," after a moment's reflection, "and if agreeable I will return with you."

"I shall be pleased if you can do so, sir."

And so it was arranged.

They set out together, and by the time they reached their destination they had a mutual liking for each other.

In the interview that followed between the clergyman and Stedman, Ruy was at his best, and the mother and daughter both admired him greatly.

But it was the same wherever he went. He was liked by everybody.

The interview was satisfactory, and it ended with the promise of the young clergyman to help Stedman all he could to gain admittance into the theological seminary from which he himself had graduated.

When the interview was about at an end, Dr. Lairdshaw was announced.

He and the clergyman were acquainted, as has been shown, and when greetings had been exchanged all around, and there was a momentary pause, the doctor observed:

"I have been thinking about coming out to see you, Mr. Rodman."

"So?" the clergyman responded; "I should be pleased to have you do so. In fact, I want to have a talk with you."

"If that is the case I will return with you part way when you go. I want to talk about that Barremore matter."

"Is it possible? Why, that is the very thing that I wanted to see you about. As I am now about to take my leave, however, you can call on me at any time."

"No, I will go with you. Miss Westervall will pardon me, I know, under the circumstances, will you not?" turning to her.

"Yes, certainly," Guenver said.

As the young clergyman looked at her as she responded, he noticed that she was slightly pale, and that she seemed much interested in the matter that had been mentioned.

He wondered why, but he was soon partly enlightened.

"Miss Westervall and Miss Barremore were warm friends," the doctor explained, "and she has an interest in what I have made up my mind to mention to you."

"If that is the case," said the clergyman,

"she is the very person with whom I would like to talk respecting the affair. Will it be objectionable to you, Miss Westervall?"

"Indeed, no," Guenver answered; "and you may both speak freely," she added, "for I have taken mother into my confidence regarding a certain suspicion I hold."

"A suspicion!" Ruy Rodman exclaimed.

"Yes, a suspicion. But I will not speak of that yet. We will hear what Mr. Lairdshaw has to say."

The doctor showed a decided interest.

"This is as it should be," he observed. "I see no reason why it should not be talked openly here, though Stedman knows nothing about it as yet."

"I will retire—"

So the young man started to say, but the doctor interrupted him.

"Do nothing of the kind," he said. "Your advice and assistance are needed in this matter. Sit down again. And now, since I was the first to bring this subject up, I suppose I ought to speak first."

"Go ahead and do so," the clergyman invited. "I will wait, for I desire to learn what the suspicions are of which you have spoken."

"Our suspicion," said the doctor, "is that the woman you married as Huldah Barremore, on that memorable Saturday night, was not Huldah Barremore at all."

"Ha!" the clergyman exclaimed, "I was sure of it! I guessed what the suspicion was. I feel sure that such was the fact. But, go on with what you have to say, doctor."

CHAPTER XXIII.

DOCTOR LAIRDSLAW CONFESSES.

INTENSE interest was manifested by all.

It was a revelation of Stedman Westervall that he had not dreamed of.

He had read the account of it all in the papers, to be sure, and had talked with Herold Keenan about it since his return, but had not for a moment dreamed that the case was otherwise than it appeared upon the face.

He had been a companion of Herold Keenan's, by the way, and knew him and his associates well.

"I did not believe it from the first," the doctor declared, "but I stood alone in my unbelief, and could not make my suspicion known to any one. Within a few days, however, Miss Westervall has come to my support, and her argument is strong. We can produce no proof, however."

The doctor went on, then, and told in detail all the points that he could bring to bear, holding back nothing but his own terrible secret.

"You, Miss Westervall, are just the person I desire to see in regard to my part of the mystery," spoke up the clergyman, when Mervyn had done. "You knew Huldah Barremore well, I am given to understand."

"Yes, sir, I did," the lady answered. "We were almost constant companions. We loved each other very much."

"Very good. Now, what leads you to believe that this woman is not the same Huldah whom you know so well?"

In reply, Guenver went over the points that have been set forth, dwelling on each one with telling effect.

"That is almost as good as proof positive," the clergyman declared, "but of course it would amount to little in open court. I am fully persuaded that there is a deep and rascally scheme here, and as I have played a certain role in it, innocently, I desire to see it all brought to the light."

"One of my converts the other night was a man named Mike Burke. He was a very evil-looking person, and just such a man as one would not want to meet in a lonely place on a dark night—or any other kind of a night, for that matter. And, according to his own story, he had been just as vile as he was evil-looking. Among his other accomplishments, in the way of evil-doing, he was a grave-robber."

"His conversion was genuine. I had touched the right spot in him, and the little spark of goodness that remained burst into a consuming flame. He almost ran out of the church, and I saw nothing of him again until two hours or so later, when he came to the parsonage to see me. I admitted him, had a long talk with him, and sent him away feeling that he was a new man. This morning, however, he was back again, saying that there was something on his mind that he must disclose."

"Well, he went ahead, and his confession was a remarkable one. He was urged on to make it by the same suspicion that you have advanced. He believed that it was not Huldah Barremore that I had married to Herold Keenan. His reason for that suspicion was this: The account of it in the papers mentioned, and correctly, that I married the couple while that terrific shower was raging; and he avers most positively that the dead girl's body was not taken from the grave until after that storm was over."

"How does he know that?" demanded Dr. Lairdshaw.

"He was one of the rascals who dug the body up."

"Where is he now?" the doctor cried; "I must

see him at once. I must learn what became of that body."

As he put the question, eager and excited he sprung up.

"It will do you no good to see him," Ruy averred, "for he does not know what was done with it. I asked him."

"But the other man must know," Mervyn persisted.

"Yes; but, unfortunately, Burke does not know his name, though he has hopes that he may be able to find him."

"And so he must do. We must see him and start him—"

"Pardon me," the clergyman interrupted, "but I have already set him at work, and he will report to me when he discovers him."

"Hail then you are going to take a hand in righting the wrong, eh?"

"I mean to have a hand in getting at the truth of the matter if I can. What will come of it, though, I cannot imagine."

Mervyn Lairdshaw was pacing the floor nervously.

Now it was no longer doubts with him. Here was information that pointed to positive proof that the so-called plot had been a monstrous lie.

"But what is to be done?" he questioned. "I cannot sit idly by and do nothing, while an adventuress, perhaps, fills the place of the woman I loved."

"I do not see that anything can be done at present," answered the clergyman. "We must not make a single move that will disclose our suspicions until we have proof in hand."

"I can see that you are right in that," Mervyn admitted.

"And not a word of this must go beyond this little circle," spoke up Mrs. Westervall.

"Indeed, no," echoed Guenver, "for if our suspicions are true, steps might be taken to destroy the only proofs we might otherwise get hold of."

"No, nothing must be done hastily," agreed the doctor. "We must work with system, and make no moves that are not first carefully considered. We must organize, in a way, and recognize one of our number as our head and leader."

"And I would suggest that you take that post yourself," the clergyman spoke up immediately.

"I cannot do it," was the response. "I am so run down that I am but a shadow of my former self, and I realize that my mind is not far from being unbinged. You would not wonder at this, if you knew all."

"And your admission of a moment ago that you loved Huldah Barremore," observed the clergyman, "gives us the clew to your meaning."

The doctor groaned in spirit. Only he himself knew the frightful truth, and no one else could for a moment suspect it.

The matter was talked over at great length, and when the little company broke up, and the clergyman and the doctor went away together, all were determined to push on to the end in the work they had undertaken.

Certain it was that they had grounds enough, now, for suspecting what they did, as well as some faint clews to guide them in their work.

Stedman Westervall had had little to say during the conference, but as soon as the doctor and the clergyman were gone, he remarked:

"I believe that I have a part to play in this game, too."

"What is it?" asked his mother and Guenver together.

"I know Herold Keenan about as well as any one in this city, and I know nearly all of his friends and associates."

"But, you have severed all connection with them forever," the mother reminded.

"Yes, so I have, but if by holding my place with them a little longer I can learn anything that may throw some light upon this mystery, I feel that I ought to do it."

"But the risk, think of that. No, no, my son, not for a moment must you go back with them!"

Guenver echoed the same sentiment, but Stedman made no promise. He did, however, assure them that they need have no fears of his receding from the stand he had taken.

In the mean time Ruy Rodman and Mervyn Lairdshaw had gone on, still holding to the subject of conversation.

"Since you have been chosen as our leader in this matter," Mervyn remarked, "I feel that you should know everything in connection with it that can be told."

"Then you know still more than has been thus far revealed?" the clergyman interrogated.

"Yes, I do. I know more than any one has even dreamed of."

"Well, you may confide in me, if you desire to do so."

"And I do. I must tell some one the awful truth, or I shall go mad."

Ruy Rodman could but eye the young doctor in wonder.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Just what my words imply," was the assurance. "I want to take you into my confidence,

and tell you the secret that is wearing out my life, but I cannot do so unless you first promise me that you will never reveal it."

"I think I can safely promise that, sir. At any rate, I will not reveal it without your consent."

"On those conditions, I will tell you all. You know something of me, Mr. Rodman, and of the reputation I bear in this city."

"I do, sir."

"Well, what would you say if you were told that Doctor Lairdshaw is a murderer? That the stain of a human life is upon his soul?"

Ruy Rodman started, with a feeling as of an icy hand clutching his very heart. He stopped short, and his face turned ashy pale. He looked at the doctor for fully a minute before he spoke.

"I could not believe it," he finally answered.

"But what if I myself were to tell you that it is so?" Mervyn persisted.

"Still I could not credit it. I am inclined to think that your mind is indeed upset, doctor, and that you are more ill than you will allow yourself to believe. Come, I will conduct you home."

Mervyn smiled sadly.

Well did he know that he was ill, and well did he know that his mind had been so long tortured by his horrible secret that it was a wonder that he was not insane.

"I am almost ill, I admit," he said, "and I know that my mind is all but upset, but I know what I am saying. Let us walk on."

They proceeded, the clergyman having partly recovered from the shock he had received, and the doctor continued:

"What I have hinted at, Mr. Rodman, I believe to be the truth. I believe that I am a murderer. Every proof that is added to show that the present Mrs. Keenan is not the former Huldah Barremore, adds weight to my guilty conscience."

"Doctor, you are talking in riddles," Ruy declared.

"I suppose I am, but having started I will tell you the whole terrible truth, and then you will understand me."

Mervyn proceeded, then, and made a full confession of everything.

Ruy Rodman listened in increasing surprise, and when Mervyn had done he exclaimed:

"Wonderful! It sounds more like some high-wrought piece of fiction, than like a statement of actual occurrence. I can scarcely credit it. No longer can I wonder at your failing health and absence of mind, Doctor Lairdshaw. Come right on home with me, for we must have a long and earnest discussion over this serious affair."

Mervyn gladly accepted the invitation, and they were nearly at their destination even then. For two hours he was with the clergyman in his study, and when he finally took his leave his face was brighter than it had been before. What their conversation had been need not be shown. One point may be mentioned, however, and that was that the clergyman had given his promise that he would bring the truth to the light if it lay in his power to do it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DEAD AND THE LIVING MEET.

DURING all this time the mystery concerning Jeannette Bingham remained the same.

The police had been unable to discover anything that could lead to an explanation as to where the girl had been during her brief absence from home, or to advance any satisfactory theory as to what had caused her to forget the past.

Gradually they had allowed the matter to drop, and it was likely to prove one of those peculiar cases that are never explained.

Under Mrs. Blossom's care, Jeannette had regained her health, and with the return of that she learned very fast—or rather what she had known came rapidly back to her, so far as talking, reading, writing, etc., were concerned. Events of the past, however, were entirely as though they never had happened.

She had been employed as assistant cashier in a large store, previous to her strange disappearance, and when her health returned again Mrs. Blossom went with her to the store to see about her getting the position back.

Jeannette had been greatly liked at the store, and had been found capable and trustworthy in the position she had held, and when the matter was explained to the manager he agreed to restore her to the place.

But here, as in other things, the girl's memory was at fault. She did not remember any of the faces that had once all been familiar to her, and when she was taken to her former place in the office she acted as one who had never been there before.

It was touching, to witness the helplessness with which she looked around, and it was more so when she sunk down upon a chair and burst into tears.

"I do not see that she can resume her place," said the manager, not unkindly, "but she is welcome to come and try to relearn what she has forgotten, and if she can do that she shall be taken back again."

This was quickly agreed to, both by Jeannette and Mrs. Blossom, and Jeannette remained.

She and the cashier had been good friends, and as soon as the others were out of the way the cashier began to show her her duties.

By the time the closing hour came Jeannette was able to do fairly well, and in two or three days the cashier reported that she was capable of resuming the duties of the position.

Andrew Buzbee, the student at the medical college, had renewed his acquaintance with her, though it was an entirely new one on her part, and called occasionally at Mrs. Blossom's to see her.

Of course he guarded well the secret he held, and nothing of it was allowed to escape him in their talks.

It would never do, he believed, for the girl to learn the truth.

To be sure it was a mystery that puzzled him greatly, and one which he greatly desired to solve, but the likelihood of his doing so seemed slim indeed.

Up to this time nothing had been seen of Asher Toothwart, the man who had brought her body to the college.

Buzbee wanted to see him.

What it was that was keeping Toothwart away he could not imagine, unless he had heard about the matter and was afraid of being questioned.

One evening Buzbee and Jeannette, in company with the lady cashier of the store in which Jeannette was assistant, and another young man attended a play.

When it was over, and they were coming out of the theater, a strange incident happened in the lobby.

It was something that gave some of the participants much food for reflection, too.

As it happened, Herold Keenan and Huldah had attended the same play that night, and just as Buzbee and his companions came down the staircase on the left side of the lobby, Herold and his bride came down that on the right.

They were near the bottom of the steps, when Buzbee caught sight of Huldah, and her wonderful resemblance to Jeannette arrested his attention.

Turning to Jeannette, he said:

"Look over there, Miss Bingham, and see yourself."

Jeannette looked, and just as she did so Herold and Huldah caught sight of her, and they stared as though suddenly struck dumb with terror.

Herold Keenan's face grew pale, and his eyes opened wider than they had perhaps ever opened before, while he clutched the broad railing as though in fear of falling, and averted his face.

Huldah, too, showed the greatest agitation, and her eyes turned from Jeannette to Buzbee with an expression of the wildest wonder.

As for Jeannette, she simply glanced in the direction Buzbee had indicated, and responded: "I believe the lady does bear some resemblance to myself; who can she be?"

"I—I do not know," was the hesitating response.

Buzbee had noted the evident agitation of the others, and knew not what to make of it.

The pause on the steps was hardly of a second's duration, but under certain circumstances a second is a long time.

It was so in this instance.

It was time enough to fill the guilty heart of Herold Keenan with abject terror, and that of his bride with fear and wonder.

Of course the reader has guessed long ere this that Jeannette Bingham and Huldah Barremore had, by a remarkable chain of circumstances, exchanged places. It was a situation that was truly unique, and one which would require the utmost daring and tact either to maintain or alter.

After the momentary pause on the stairs, Herold Keenan hurried on and out with his wife, and the pair entering the cab that was waiting for them, they were driven rapidly away to the ferry.

Buzbee and his party turned their steps in another direction.

"Who was that lady who looked so much like you?" Jeannette's lady companion asked. "Did you know her?"

"No, I did not," Jeannette answered.

"Did you, Mr. Buzbee?"

"No; and I suppose you did not, either."

"No, I did not. It was quite remarkable. You and she look enough alike to be twins, Jeannette."

A few more remarks, and the subject was dropped and thought of no more, except by Buzbee.

He had taken a keener view of the situation than any of the others. He had noted the frightened look upon the face of the man accompanying the lady, and her look in his direction was almost one of recognition. To be sure, though, he could not say whether it was directed at him or at Jeannette.

The question that now hummed in his mind was, who could these persons be? Had they had anything to do with the mystery that surrounded Jeannette's sudden disappearance and strange

return? It was a question that refused to be answered.

It was not until the next day, when he was telling Trimmerty about the strange occurrence, that a new suspicion was forced upon his mind.

"You say the two looked so much alike?" Trimmerty questioned.

"They looked exactly alike, or seemed to," was the assurance Buzbee gave.

"And you saw them both at one and the same time?"

"Why, of course."

"And you think the stranger recognized you?"

"I am sure that she recognized either me or Miss Bingham."

"Well, has it occurred to you that that person may have been the real Jeannette Bingham, and this other who now fills her place, her double? Here is an explanation of the strange loss of memory."

Buzbee sprang to his feet with such suddenness that he dropped the cigar he was smoking.

"By heavens!" he cried, "I never once thought of that. I wonder if it can be so?"

"I am ready to credit anything, after that girl came to life here on the dissecting slab."

"Yes, and so am I, almost. But, if this is not Jeannette, who is she, and where did she come from?"

"You ask me too much now, Buzbee."

"I would like to get hold of that man Toothwart for about two minutes, and I would choke out of him all the knowledge he has of the matter."

Buzbee's manner showed that he meant what he said, and he was probably large enough to carry out his design if chance offered.

In the mean time, to return to the night of the incident at the theater, as soon as Herold Keenan and his wife were in the cab and the cab had started, Herold demanded:

"Who was that woman?"

"I don't know," was the reply; "I never saw her before."

"You seemed to recognize her."

"No; I recognized the man who was with her."

"Well, and who was he?"

"His name is Buzbee."

"You know him, then?"

"Yes, I used to know him."

"That face was the face of the Huldah Barremore, whose place you occupy, if I ever saw it in my life."

The woman shuddered. A chill of coming danger seemed to seize her.

"But, of course it can't be," she boldly declared.

"No, of course not; and yet it is more than remarkable that there could be three persons all looking so much alike. Did you not note the striking likeness that woman bore to yourself?"

"I noticed more than that, but the time was so brief that I could not give her as close a look as now I wish I had."

"What do you mean?"

"Now that it all rushes upon me," the woman answered, "I hardly know what to make of it. I saw in that moment, not another person before me, but my own reflection, as it seemed to be. That woman had on my clothes!"

"The deuce!"

For a time neither spoke.

"I cannot understand it," Herold finally muttered, "but there is a mystery in all this that I must solve. Something seems to tell me that there is danger ahead. I know not what it is, but I must be prepared for it. Who is this person who was in the company of a man you knew? How was it that she had on clothes that you recognized as those you used to wear, and not long ago, either? I tell you, Jean—I mean Huldah, that there is danger ahead, but it must be bravely met. I know not what it can be, but success is ours, and it shall not be wrested from us now. Not though I have to wade in blood to hold the place, I will not give it up."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BALL SET ROLLING.

THERE came a ring at the door of the parsonage.

Anastasia Budd hastened to answer it, as she always did.

She recognized the man who had called on two other occasions to see the clergyman, the man Mike Burke.

"I want ter see ther capt'n— No, I beg yer parding," he hastened to alter; "I mean ther Dominie."

"Eigh?" Anastasia interrogated, her hand going up to her ear.

"I say I want ter see ther preacher," Mike repeated.

"Oh! all right. Just wait, and I'll tell him."

Ruy Rodman was in his study at the time, and in a few minutes the caller was ushered in.

"Mr. Burke, I am glad to see you," the young clergyman exclaimed, giving his hand. "How do you do? How are you holding out in your good intentions?"

"I am all right, thank 'e," was the answer, "an' I am a-holdin' out all right, too."

"That is what I like to hear. You will find it

easy enough, if you just make up your mind to it, and put all your trust in Him."

"An' that's what I mean ter do. But I've come ter see ye this time on that other biz, parson."

"So I hoped. Well, what have you discovered?"

"I have found ther man."

"Indeed! Who is he, and where does he live?"

"His name is Asher Wooster, an' he is in the truck-raisin' business just out of Wellsford."

"Good enough; I will remember the name. Have you spoken to him?"

"No, I didn't let him see me, fer I thought it would be best not ter. I did not know jest how you wanted ter handle the matter."

"It is just as well, and perhaps better. I will go out there and pay him a visit very soon."

"And is there anything more that I kin do?"

"Not at present, I guess. If you are needed, I can let you know."

"That's all you'll have ter do, an' I'll be ready ter serve ye. I want ter see ther end of this thing, an' if there is anything crooked about it, I want ter see it made straight."

"And I think there is something very crooked about it, as you express it," the clergyman declared. "We will not talk of that now, however," he added.

"Jest as you please."

"Where do you live?" Ruy asked.

Burke gave his address, as well as naming some places where he might be found if not at home, and after some further talk he went away.

That afternoon the young clergyman took a train for Wellsford.

Arriving at that place, he made inquiry for Asher Wooster, and in due time found himself at his house.

Mr. Wooster happened to be in the house, and it was he who came to the door and opened it in response to the knock.

"I want to see Mr. Asher Wooster," the caller announced.

"That's me," the man owned.

"Very good," Ruy observed, adding: "I would like to have a little private talk with you, Mr. Wooster."

"Then we'll walk out to'rds th' barn," said Asher; "jest wait till I get my hat on."

He disappeared for a moment, but soon came out and led the way toward the out-buildings.

"What d'ye want ter see me about?" he asked.

"Do you know who I am?" Ruy questioned.

"Don't know ye from Adam," the man declared.

"I am a clergyman from Deedham."

"Oh, a gospel-spouter, be ye? Well, I can't guess what ye want ter see me fer. If ye think ye kin convert me ye make a big mistake, fer I ain't built that way. I'm too level in ther head fer any sich foolishness. I tell ye this ter save ye on unnecessary waste of time an' trouble, if that's yer intent."

As the man said this he stopped short and looked the young clergyman in the face fearlessly.

"I have not come here with that intention, Mr. Wooster," said Ruy, "though I can see that you are sadly in need of that very thing. I cannot convert you, that is true enough, perhaps; but there is One who can, and who—"

"See here, mister," the man interrupted, "if you have got any business ter do with me, let's hear what it is. If not, if some of these meddlin' neighbors o' mine has sent ye here ter talk slish-wosh ter me, th' best thing you kin do is ter git out. That's th' kind of a man I am."

The young clergyman had heard enough to show him just the kind of man Asher Wooster was indeed. He found him a wicked, daring man, defiant of all sacred things and sentiments, and one who was not held in very good repute among his neighbors.

"It is readily seen what kind of a man you are, Mr. Wooster," was the civil but fearless response, "and I would feel ashamed to call myself a servant of the Master I serve did I not speak a word of warning to you. There is a Judgment Day coming, sir, in which your soul will stand in fear and trembling—"

"Git out of here!" the man screamed, almost frothing at the mouth in his sudden outburst of rage, and he poured forth a volley of oaths that was enough to raise the clergyman's hair on end; "git out, I say, or I'll wipe up th' ground with ye!"

Ruy stood still, not flinching a muscle, and presently the man began to cower before his steady gaze.

"I came to see you on business, Mr. Wooster," he reminded, as soon as he had the opportunity, "and I will now state it, if you will allow me to do so."

"Well, spit it out quick, then," Asher invited.

"I have come to get a little information."

"Well, why don't ye ask it?"

"You made it necessary for me to speak of other things first. I will come to the point now, however. Do you remember a certain Saturday night, about three months ago, when there was a very heavy storm about nine o'clock?"

Asher Wooster's eyes opened wide.

"I think I do," he said.

"Yes, I think you do, too," insinuated Ruy. "I mean the night that you robbed that grave in the North End Cemetery at Deedham," he added.

The man turned as white as a ghost is supposed to be, and his mouth dropped open in his sudden fright.

He brought his strong will to bear immediately, however, and speedily recovered.

"What do you mean?" he thundered, with another bristling array of oaths.

"Just what I say," Ruy assured, adding:

"The information I am after, Mr. Wooster, is to learn what disposition you made of that body after you loaded it into your wagon and took it away."

Ruy could see that the man was badly frightened, but also that he meant to be defiant and deny everything.

For a moment he did not speak, but when he did it was to pour out another string of oaths, at the close of which he bellowed:

"That's what I think of you, and th' sooner you go about your business th' better it will be fer yer health. I have a notion ter have ye 'rested, an' make ye prove that charge; I have, by thunder!"

"You are welcome to do so," said Ruy, calmly. "I can prove it easily enough. That piece of business is known, Mr. Wooster, and you had better come to terms. If you will tell me what you did with that body, it may save you greater trouble."

The assertion that the charge could be proven caused the rascal to drawn in his horns a little.

"See here, mister," he began to compromise, "this is a serious charge you make ag'in me, an' we had better talk a little lower."

"I have no fear of man, that I should speak any lower," the young clergyman said impressively, "and as for God, He can hear a whisper as distinctly as a shout."

"Yes, I know all about that, but I don't want sich a story ter git out about me, when there's no truth in it. There is some big mistake, mister; you have come to th' wrong place."

"It is of no use for you to deny it," Ruy persisted, "for I assure you that I can bring the proof, if you make it necessary."

"And what is yer proof? Come, now, you are so sure of this thing, what is yer proof?"

"I need not tell you. That will be brought forward all in good time. On that Saturday night you drove past my house after dark, and tied your horse behind the wall of the cemetery. Then you pulled some pickets from the fence and went in. The grave you wanted to find had been marked for you, and you knew about where to find it. You went straight to it, and began to dig. The storm came on, and you had to stop work. You lay there under the shelter of the wall till the rain ceased, when you finished your work, secured the body, put it into your wagon, and drove away. Now, Asher Wooster, what did you do with that body?"

The rascal listened to this in the greatest amazement.

How had this man learned the facts so accurately? He desired to question, but to do so would be to admit his guilt.

"That is a mighty bad charge," he muttered, "but I tell ye, parson, that you are on a false scent this time. I don't know nothin' about it, and it ain't at all likely that I would go clean over ter Deedham ter dig up a body, with a big cemetery of our own right at hand, even if I was in that line o' business, which I ain't."

"You might do it, if you were paid well enough for it."

"But I tell ye I didn't do it!" the man persisted, and he rattled off another lively string of cuss-words.

If he thought to scare the young clergyman off by that means, however, he was mistaken.

"Your swearing does not alter the matter one jot," Ruy declared. "You know that you are guilty, and so do I know it. Now, will you confess the whole matter, or do you prefer to stand arrest and trial?"

"See here, what funeral is this of yours, anyhow?" Wooster challenged.

"That need not concern you," was the answer. "Either give me the information I am after, or refuse. You have your choice."

The swearing that followed then was frightful, and seeing that there was no use in further waste of words, Ruy started away, leaving the enraged Wooster still swearing and shaking his fist after him with all the energy he could summon.

He felt that his first move had not been altogether a success.

CHAPTER XXVI.

KEENAN IS HORRIFIED.

BARELY half an hour had the clergyman been gone, when Asher Wooster had another caller. This time it was Herold Keenan.

"Well, an' what in blazes do you want?" Asher demanded, at sight.

Keenan looked at him in surprise.

"You seem to be a little out of humor," he observed.

"Out o' humor!" growled Asher; "I'm howlin' mad, that's what's th' matter o' me. What brings ye here?"

"I want to have a little talk with you."

"That's what the other feller said, dast him! I don't reckon you care a tinker's tink about my future welfare, though."

"You are about right there. But, what are you talking about? What other fellow do you refer to?"

"Why, a pulpit thumper from Deedham what's jist been here ter convert me. I tell ye he had th' narrowest escape he ever had o' gittin' a durn good thumpin' himself."

Keenan laughed.

"That's a pretty rich joke," he exclaimed. "No, I have not come here with any such idea in mind at all," he added. "I want a point or two of information, however."

"Just what he wanted, too. Say, what is rotten in Denmark, anyhow? What is in ther wind? What is goin' on?"

"I'm sure I don't know," declared Keenan. "I don't know what you are talking about. It is plain that that preacher's business and mine can have nothing in common. I have come to talk with you about that job you did for me some time ago."

Asher Wooster ripped out some startling oaths.

"That is jist exactly what he wanted, too," he declared, "an' nothin' else. That's what makes me want ter know what is rotten. I knowed you was after th' same information th' minnit I see'd ye."

Herold Keenan turned ashy pale.

"What is this you say?" he demanded; "what did he want?"

"He wanted ter know what I did with that body that night."

"Heavens! what does he know?"

"He seems ter know a good deal," Asher growled. "He threatens ter make me tell what I know, too, but he'll have ter find me first. I wish I'd never took holt o' that job at all, fer it's bound ter git me inter trouble."

They were standing in the yard by the barn, and Keenan was pacing to and fro in the greatest agitation.

"See here," he suddenly cried, stopping short, "who was that man? Tell me just what he said and what he wanted."

"That's about what I have done a'ready."

"Yes, but I want to know his name."

"Then you'll have ter go ter him ter git it. He didn't leave it with me, an' I didn't ax him fer it."

"What sort of looking man was he?"

"Well, he was a youngish chap, pooty good-lookin', and had a pair of side-whiskers on his chops."

"Did he say what part of the city he was from?"

Keenan was deeply interested, and his manner proved it.

"Yes, he belongs to that North End Church where you sent me that night. He knows all about that piece of work, that is plain enough, but how he found it out is more than I kin see."

"Are you sure that he *does* know anything? Was he not simply trying to find out something from you?"

"What would bring him to me if he didn't know somethin' about it?"

Keenan took several more turns up and down the yard before responding.

"See here, Wooster," he presently exclaimed, "there is trouble coming out of this thing, just as you say, and we can't shut our eyes to the fact. I must know just what that young clergyman said to you, and what it was he was after. Give me an outline of what was said, as near as you can."

"It would make yer hair curl ter hear what I said ter him, fer I cussed him till the air was blue, but what he said ter me is easier told. He wanted ter know what I did with that body on that night, an' I wouldn't tell anything. In fact, I denied all knowledge about it. I didn't know nothin'. He went on, though, and told me enough ter satisfy me that he knowed what he was talkin' about."

"Well, what *did* you do with the body? Come, that is just what I want to find out, too."

"Why do ye want ter know?"

"Haven't I a right ter know? Didn't I pay you big for the work?"

"Yes, an' that's all right. I done th' work, an' there's an end of it. I have seen enough mention of th' matter in th' Deedham papers ter show that th' body was missin' good enough, an' what more d'ye care fer?"

"I care for this: I must know what was done with that body, and it will be to your interest to tell me."

"How much to my interest?"

"Ten dollars."

"Bah! say fifty, an' I'll tell ye."

"Fifty it is."

"Let's feel th' rocks."

"Come, Wooster, you are trying my patience too far. Here is the money, if you are afraid to take my word; and now talk."

The man had seen by Keenan's eagerness that he would probably pay for the information he desired, and acted accordingly.

He took the money Keenan offered, and cramming it down into his vest pocket, said:

"Well, now you shall have what you've paid fer. I took that body ter New York that same night an' sold it ter the students at th' Saughbone Medical College, an' I reckon it's past all findin' by this time."

Keenan turned sick at heart, rascal though he was.

"You infernal hound!" he cried, "you deserve to be shot! I did not pay you to do any such a thing as that. I told you to take the body and bury it elsewhere, did I not?"

Wooster laughed.

"That was my business," he retorted. "I got th' body out of your way, which was all you cared about anyhow, an' then I wasn't fool enough ter throw away a good chance ter turn another honest penny—oh, no."

"Hanging would be too good for you," Keenan declared, with genuine indignation. "You ought to be burned alive."

He was not so hardened that all his finer feelings were blunted, and if anything was likely to arouse them it was the knowledge that the girl who had loved him, and who had been willing to marry him, had come to such an end.

"There's a pair of us, then," returned Wooster. "I guess my hands are about as clean as your'n. If we was both put inter a gun an' fired to'rds State Prison, I reckon you would git there about as quick as I would."

Keenan was not listening. He was pacing up and down the yard. His mind was in great trouble. What of that face he had seen at the theater, the face that was so much like that of the dead Huldah and the dead Jeannette? And now what of this new turn of affairs? How had that clergyman learned anything about the matter? How much did he know?

Soon he stopped and faced Wooster again.

"Say, what are you going to do?" he demanded.

"I am going to be scarce," was the answer. "That feller said that he intended ter arrest me, an' I'm goin' ter light out."

"I want you to do something for me first."

"What is it? I've done too much already fer ye. See th' trouble I have got inter by it. That five hundred dollars don't begin ter pay me fer it."

"It was big pay, altogether too big for the way you served me. I'll pay you big again, though, if you will do another job."

"Th' same kind?"

"No; I'm done with that sort of work."

"What then?"

"I want you to go to that college and learn just what was done with that body after you left it there."

"Can't do it."

"Why not?"

"Th' boss of th' place has threatened ter arrest me if I show my head there again."

"Can't you go on the quiet and see the students you sold the body to?"

"I might manage it that way, somehow."

"Do it, and give me the correct information, and I will pay you fifty dollars more."

"You'll have to bid higher than that. You'll have ter make it a hundred, or I don't go. I am on the make now, as I have got ter git out o' sight. But, what is th' use o' goin' there an' askin' that? It is easy enough ter understand what they done with th' body. They don't buy 'em ter give away."

"What I want the information for is my business, and if I am willing to pay for it that is all that it need concern you. I'll give you the hundred, if you will serve me well and get what I desire to know."

"I'm yer man. I'll have ter write to ye, though, fer I won't be back here fer a time."

"All right, just direct your letter to me at Deedham, and I'll get it at the office."

"Good enough; where's th' hundred?"

Keenan went down into his pocket again, and another roll of bills was passed over to the villainous accomplice.

"I'll go there this night," Wooster promised, "an' you'll hear from me ter-morrer."

"I shall be on the lookout for the letter. Do not fool me, and do not fail to get what I want."

"Trust me fer that. I can't understand what is in th' wind, that this matter should come up all of a sudden, but I'm goin' ter take care that Number One don't git mixed up inter it any further."

More talk followed, on both sides, but Wooster got no information out of Keenan, and of course had no more to give, and Keenan soon went away.

Wooster looked after him with a cunning grin.

"I bled ye, didn't I," he muttered to himself. "If you hear of me goin' ter that college, let me know it. I'll write ye a letter jist th' same, howsumever."

And Keenan, as he took himself off, was more disturbed in mind than he had been when he came. Instead of being satisfied, with positive information that the body of Huldah Barremore had been buried somewhere, as he had directed, he had learned the appalling truth that it had been sold to medical students.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LED INTO A TRAP.

In the mean time, Ruy Rodman had returned to Deedham.

He felt, as said, that his visit to Mr. Wooster had not been a success.

And yet it had been a success, too, for the man's manner had been almost positive proof of his guilt.

Ruy had had no reason to disbelieve the story that had been told him by Mike Burke, and now he had every reason to believe that it was strictly true in every part so far as the crime was concerned.

But how to proceed against Asher Wooster now? That was the question that puzzled him. There seemed but one thing to be done, and that was to get a warrant for him, and have him arrested on the charge. There were objectionable points to that, however. It would make known the suspicions they held.

The young clergyman felt that although he had undertaken to do a little detective work, he had no detective ability. A detective, he thought, would have forced the truth out of the man in some way or other.

Undoubtedly a detective would have employed different argument with the rascal, but whether he would have met with any better success or not may be questioned, dealing with such a man as Wooster.

Arriving at Deedham, Ruy immediately sought an interview with Dr. Lairdshaw, informed him of what had taken place, and asked for advice how to proceed.

Mervyn could not give it, and they decided to go together and consult with Guenver Westervall.

They went at once, and she was found at home.

The case was laid before her.

"If we arrest him," she observed, "it will make public the suspicion we hold, and we have not enough proof to support it yet."

This was what the others had felt to be true. They had only the statement of the man, Mike Burke, which would not be taken without proof, if Wooster denied it—and he did. Then, too, when it came to the test, Burke might back out of it himself, and leave them with nothing.

"We all seem to think alike," said Ruy. "The time does not seem to be ripe for the arrest to be made."

"We must have further proof," declared Mervyn.

"And how are we to get it?" questioned Guenver.

"Why not employ the services of a good detective?" the clergyman suggested.

"We have a detective already," reminded the doctor.

"And one who has made a poor showing of his ability," declared Ruy. "It seems to me that we ought to employ a man who can devote his whole time to the matter, and who is well used to such work."

"I think we can do without one for the present," objected Guenver, "though, of course, I don't pretend to know much about it. Have we sufficient ground for one to go to work on, even if we did employ him?"

"Yes, we certainly have that," the clergyman assured.

"But, the more we take into the case, the less of a secret it will be," the lady still objected, "and who can say but the detective might be bought off? If our suspicions are true, Herold Keenan will take desperate measures to hold the position he has won."

"There is reason in that," Ruy admitted.

"I think we had better let the matter rest as it is for a day or two at any rate," advised the doctor. "We will gain nothing by haste. Another interview with the man at Westford may bring a better result."

"How would it do to pay him for the information we want?" suggested Guenver.

"I fear that would not do at all," responded the clergyman. "In the first place, he is a man of strong character—and bad character at that, and he would not be likely to tell us anything without a promise on our part that he should not get into any trouble."

"And that we will never promise," declared Guenver. "He shall suffer, if he is guilty."

"Is that your spirit of forgiveness?" asked Ruy.

"In such a matter as this, yes," was the firm response.

"Well, I do not reprove you, for the same sentiment is mine. But, have we reached an understanding? Shall we let the case rest as it is for a day or two, and then— And then what?"

It was not easy to decide. The situation was so peculiar that they hardly knew what course to take.

It was still undecided when they parted, except in a general way that no action against Asher Wooster should be taken just then.

That night, after the service in the church was over, there came a one-horse carriage to the parsonage.

It stopped, and an old man got out.

Going up the steps with a slow gait, as an old man naturally would, he rung the bell, and

when he had had the usual dialogue with the housekeeper he was admitted, and the clergyman was notified that a caller desired to see him.

Ruy went immediately down to the sitting-room, into which the caller had been shown.

He saw at a glance that the man was a stranger to him.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

"I want you to come to my house immediately and see my dying wife," was the request.

"Where do you live, sir?" was the next question.

"Over at Westford. My name is Coleby. I have my carriage here at the door, and I will bring you right back. Do not refuse, for it is my wife's desire to talk with you, and I am afraid there is not much time to lose. She attended one or two of your meetings the other week, and—"

"I will go," Ruy interrupted. "It would be my duty to do so, even were the distance twice as far, and I had to go on foot. I will be ready in a minute."

And in a minute he was ready, and entering the carriage with the stranger he was driven rapidly away.

Westford was a little hamlet about two miles north from Deedham, and there was no clergyman nearer than Deedham.

The carriage soon left the lights of Deedham behind, and rolled rapidly on out into the country over the smooth, hard pike.

They talked as they rode, the stranger telling all about his wife's ailment and her spiritual condition, and ere they had gone far he had won the young clergyman's confidence.

About half-way between Deedham and Westford they overtook a man who was evidently very lame, for he was limping painfully, as could be seen when the carriage came upon him.

Just as it was passing him he called out:

"Heigh! Mr. Coleby!"

"Whoa!" cried the old man, pulling his horse to a stop at once; and then he shouted back:

"Did you call me?"

"Yes," came the answer; "be you Mr. Coleby?"

"That's who I am," was the assurance.

"Who are you, and what do you want?"

"Why, I'm your neighbor, Tillerton. I have sprained my foot, and can't hardly get along. Won't you give me a lift?"

"Of course I will," was the hearty response.

"I didn't recognize you in the dark. Come right on and I'll help you in. A good neighbor of mine," he explained in a lower tone to the clergyman.

"Take him in, by all means, then," Ruy directed.

The man limped up to the wagon, and the old man sprang out and helped him to get in.

It occurred to the clergyman that Mr. Coleby was remarkably supple for a man of his years, as he noted the manner in which he got out and in, but the thought soon passed away.

He, the clergyman, was on the back seat of the carriage, while the old gentleman and his lame neighbor occupied the front one.

The carriage started on, and conversation was resumed.

Only a little further had they proceeded, though, when the driver suddenly turned the horse from the turnpike into an almost unused by-road.

Ruy had never been over any part of this road, but he knew that it did not lead to Westford.

"How is this?" he demanded; "I understood you to say you live at Westford. This road does not go there."

"It means, hold your tongue, or you are a dead man!"

It was a startling command, and it was accompanied by a startling transformation in the supposed lame man. It was he who uttered the words, and as he did so he flashed a bull's-eye light in the young clergyman's face and presented a revolver at his head.

"Don't ye open yer mouth," he further cautioned, "or I'll shoot ye so quick ye won't know it."

What could be the meaning of this?

That question Ruy asked himself, as he tried to recover from the sudden thrill of fear that had come upon him.

As soon as he had in measure recovered from the shock, he quietly asked:

"What is the meaning of this?"

"I told you to hold your jaw," was the answer he got. "You will find all out in good time."

"But you have deceived me, and I demand an explanation."

If he had felt a thrill of fear at first, it had passed away now. He made the demand for an explanation in tones that were imperative.

"Shut up, fool!" hissed the man with the revolver in hand; "do you want to die here and now?"

With a sudden movement Ruy knocked up the hand that held the threatening weapon, and threw himself upon the man with full force.

Knowing well that such a manifestation as

this meant danger to him, he was determined to make an effort to escape.

Ruy Rodman was no weakling. On the contrary he had stood second to none as an all-around athlete at college.

He grasped the man's arm with a force that almost made the bones crack as he gave it a vigorous twist, and the weapon dropped to the bottom of the carriage; and at almost the same time the two men crashed over the dash and out upon the ground.

As they fell, the horse sprang forward in a fright and the wheels of the vehicle passed over them both, but as the carriage was a light one it did no damage.

Instantly, then, began a struggle for the mastery between the clergyman and his assailant, in which both put forth every effort. It was furious but brief, for by a clever trick the clergyman soon had his knee upon the rascal's breast and his hand at his throat.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A CRUEL MURDER DONE.

For the moment the clergyman held the advantage, but it was short-lived, for by this time the other man was running to the assistance of his accomplice.

Nor did he run as though he were as old as his appearance indicated. It was clear, now, that he was a young man in disguise.

Ruy heard him coming, and sprang up to meet him, hoping to fight him off till opportunity for escape offered. Being unarmed, it was his intention to run, and he would have done so at once but for the fact that the seeming old man was so near that it was necessary to meet him.

"You cowards!" the young clergyman cried, with all the force of the contempt he felt; "have you brought me here to murder me?"

"I'll show you!" hissed the disguised man, as he threw himself upon him; and he made an effort to get hold of him, which Ruy avoided.

"And I'll show you!" the young clergyman retorted as, stepping partly aside he dealt a blow straight from the shoulder that, taking the man under the ear, sent him to the ground like a log.

Ruy then turned to run, but as he did so a hand grabbed his leg and he was thrown heavily to the earth.

In a moment more both men had thrown themselves upon him, and he was at their mercy.

"We'll see whether you'll git away or not," one of them grated.

"We'll see that ye *don't* git away," hissed the other.

Ruy made yet another struggle, but seeing that it was now useless, finally succumbed.

"Do that ag'in, an' it will be yer last wiggle," warned one of the men, now again presenting a weapon at his head. "If yer make another squirm, or open yer mouth, I'll shoot ye as sure as preachin'."

The pretended old man now got up and ran to the carriage, returning in a few seconds with a halter, and together they proceeded to bind their prisoner's arms behind his back.

When that was done, further resistance was out of the question.

What was to follow?

That question Ruy Rodman asked himself, and the only answer that was suggested was that they must intend to murder him.

But why should they do that? In what way had he injured them? Who were they that they should desire to take his life?

As soon as the revolver was taken away, regardless of the warning he had received, Ruy shouted for help. Three or four good shouts were out before a hand could be clapped over his mouth.

"Curse you!" the pretended old man cried, "we ought to kill you here and now! Do you want ter bring some one to meddle with our business?"

A gag was hastily made, and forced into his mouth, and then together two men lifted him up and carried him to the waiting carriage, and when they had forced him into it they drove hastily on.

Ruy was puzzled to surmise where they could be taking him to. He knew but little about this old road, as has been stated, except that it did not go to Westford, but he had understood that there were some old and deserted iron mines somewhere along its course.

How far away these mines were, he did not know, but if these men intended to take him there they could have but one purpose in view, and that was—murder.

His very soul trembled at the thought.

Presently a brief dialogue between the pair threw some light upon the matter, but only to confirm his fears.

"Thunder!" one exclaimed, "but that feller struck a wicked blow. I didn't believe it was in him. He's raised a lump on my neck as sure as fate."

"He is a terror fer a Dominie, an' that's a fact," agreed the other. "He'll soon be where he won't hurt anybody, though."

"Ha! you're right he will. He'll soon be in that happy kingdom he spouts about."

At this the other laughed, and they were then

silent for the rest of the way to their destination.

That destination proved to be the old mine.

It was a mine that had been long ago deserted, its buildings were all in a tumble-down condition, and its shaft-timbers were fast rotting away.

Here the carriage was stopped, and the two men sprung out.

The horse was tied to a tree right at the side of the road, and that done the two wretches turned their attention to their prisoner.

Taking him from the carriage, they carried him up a path that led up the hill back of the mine buildings, finally stopping right at the verge of a deep and dark pit that, in the darkness, seemed to have no bottom.

Here they stood him upon his feet, and the gag was removed from his mouth.

"Now ye kin holler all yer want ter," he was told, "but nobody ain't likely ter hear ye. This here hole is ter be yer grave, and you won't have no sarmount said over ye, nuther."

"You do not mean to take my life, do you?" Ruy asked.

"Well, that's about th' size of it, mister," was the unfeeling answer. "It'll be an easy takin' off, ter make a dive down inter this hole an' dash yer brains on ther sharp rocks, an' you will be in th' good place afore ye know it."

"Fiends!" Ruy cried, "do you mean it?"

"Do we mean it? You jest wait an' see if we don't. Mebby we might come ter some onderstandin', though, so's it won't be necessary."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Mebby we kin come to terms."

"Name your terms."

"Be ye willin' ter listen to 'em?"

"I am. I am not ready to die, if I can save my life."

"Ha, ha, ha! ye ain't as brave about it as ye be when ye stand up in yer box an' tell other folks about it, be ye!"

"If you think I am afraid to die, you mistake. I am prepared to die, but I am not ready, if I may live by agreeing to some terms of yours."

"Well, we'll take yer word fer that. What we want ter know, now, is this: What do you know about th' Barremore affair? Tell us that an' you shall live."

The Barremore case again!

Up to this time there had been no suspicion in the young clergyman's mind of any connection between that case and his present adventure, but now it rushed upon him with sudden and terrible force.

Was this the outcome of his visit to Asher Wooster? he asked himself. Had the guilty ones already struck a blow? Did they mean to put him out of the world in this manner, and so save themselves? It might be so. But, here was a promise that he should live if he would tell all.

"Will you keep your word with me?" he asked.

"Yes, we swear we will," was the assurance.

"Well, ask your questions."

"They have been asked, and all in a lump," was the response; "what do you know about the Barremore affair?"

"Unless I know just what point you refer to," the clergyman evaded, "it will not be easy for me to answer intelligently. I know all about it that has been printed in the papers."

"That won't answer. We want ter know what you know about it that wasn't in the papers."

By resorting to falsehood, as he was tempted to do at this point, Ruy felt that there was a way out of the difficulty, provided these men had no connection with his visit to Wellsford. But a lie he scorned, so he said:

"I know that the Huldah Barremore whose funeral service I preached on that Saturday afternoon was not the one whom I married to Herold Keenan on the same night."

"Ha! how do you know that?"

"Because I married that couple during the storm, and the body of Huldah Barremore was not taken from the grave till after the shower was over."

"Indeed! Can you prove that, though?"

"I can."

One thing the clergyman noticed, and that was that these men had two ways of talking. In one style of language their expressions were uncouth and broad of accent, while in the other they talked more like men of some education.

Who they were, however, he could not conjecture, for it was plain that they were trying to disguise their voices as much as possible, and in the darkness, and disguised as they evidently were, there was no chance for recognition.

"How can you prove it?"

"I decline to tell you."

"That settles yer fate, then. You must answer all questions, an' tell all ye know, or our promise don't hold good."

"The conditions were that I should tell you all I know about this matter. It was not stipulated that I should tell you how I know."

"No matter, that was th' way we meant. Come, you had better tell, or over th' edge o' this infernal pit ye go."

"I will not tell."

"Well, we'll let that pass fer th' present. Does anybody else besides you know anything about it?"

"I decline to answer that, too. I agreed to tell what I know, but nothing more. If you do not keep your word, that I cannot help."

"Won't ye tell?"

"I will not."

"It means death to ye, as sure as th' stars are shinin'."

"I cannot help that; I will not tell."

"You kin save your life, or you kin throw it away, jest as ye please. Take your choice."

"And if I answer these two questions will you set me free and allow me to return home?"

"Yes, we will."

"I do not believe you. Go ahead and do your worst. You can only kill this body, anyhow."

"And that's all we intend ter kill. We ain't afeerd of any other part of ye. Now we'll give ye jest a minnit ter speak yer pra'r, an' then off ye go."

"I will make use of the minute, then," said Ruy, solemnly, and lifting his face to the sky, he prayed aloud:

"Heavenly Father, I trust my spirit to Thy keeping, praying that Thou wilt show mercy unto these who take my life, and forgive them. Amen."

It was brief but pointed, and its effects upon one of the men was magical. He drew back as though a sword of fire had been flashed in his face. But not so the other, for with a cry of rage he sprung forward, gave the clergyman a mighty push, and sent him spinning far out over the chasm.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DEAD ALIVE AGAIN.

"GREAT heavens! what have you done!"

So cried he of the two who had been for the moment touched by the words of prayer the young clergyman had spoken.

"What did we come here to do?" was the angry demand.

"We came here to do that very thing, of course," said the other, "but I had no heart ter do it after what he said."

"I didn't stop to waste any sentiment over that. But, come, let's get away from here as soon as we can."

"I'm willin' enough ter do that, you can bet. Come on, or my blood will all be turned to ice."

With haste born of terror they hurried away from the scene of their crime, and were soon at the place where they had left their horse. It took them but a moment to untie the animal and spring into the wagon, and laying on the whip they were soon whirling ahead over the old road.

Who they were had not been discovered by their victim, and there was no witness to their crime.

In whose interest they had worked, however, can be guessed.

But what of Ruy Rodman?

It was with a thrill of terror that he saw the man spring forward at him, and the next he realized was the awful sensation of falling down and down and down, and then his brain grew dizzy and he knew no more.

When he came to, for he had wonderfully escaped striking any of the ragged rocks in his descent, he saw that it was daylight. Far above him he could see the sunlight on the rocks.

He was chilled to the bone, and was so stiff and sore that he could not move a muscle, at first.

He looked around to learn what had saved him, and found that he had fallen upon a hill of sand that had been washed down from above by the rains since the mine had been abandoned. On this sand he had struck and rolled down its decline until he reached the shaft shelf, wholly unharmed.

His first thought, when he realized the dangers he had escaped, was to offer a prayer of thanksgiving for his almost miraculous preservation, and he did so.

That duty done, he began to think about escape from the horrible pit.

By degrees he was able to move his arms and legs, and when he had got his hands free, and the blood was fairly circulating once more, he began to feel better.

High up, on all sides, were the ragged, rocky walls; to climb out looked to be impossible. On one side of the sand-covered shelf upon which he had landed, the main shaft continued, and had he fallen only a few feet further in that direction his death would have been certain.

When he had walked about a little over the narrow bed of sand, and felt the strength returning to his chilled body, he searched the walls critically for some place where he might get hold enough to climb, but the search was in vain.

Only one thing was left for him to do, and that was to shout for help.

That he began to do.

"Help, help, help!" he called loudly, drawing the word out full and round.

Only the echo came back to him, as the waves of sound rebounded from point to point.

He called again and again, at intervals of perhaps a minute, but there was no response to his shouts, and he began to despair.

Finally, however, about an hour after he had come to, he fancied that he heard an answering shout.

He called again.

Yes, true enough, there it was again, a very faint "Hello-o-h!"

Greatly encouraged, Ruy shouted his loudest, and the answering cry was heard once more.

The shouting was continued, the answering cry coming nearer and nearer, and finally a voice above shouted down:

"Hello, down there!"

"Hello!" Ruy shouted back.

"Where be ye?" was the question.

"I am down here in the shaft of the old mine," Ruy explained.

"Who be ye, and how kem ye there?" was then demanded.

"I am a man from Deedham," Ruy responded to that, "and I got into this hole last night. Will you help me out? Who are you?"

"I am Peter, the Hermit," came back the information. "I will help ye out, but you'll have ter stay there till I kin go an' git a rope. It will take me more'n a hour."

"All right, go ahead, my friend, and I will pay you well. I will remain quiet until you come back and call to me again. Don't fail me."

"Be ye hurt much?" was asked.

"No, I am not injured any," Ruy replied.

"All right; I'll be off an' git back as soon as I kin."

Nothing more was heard, and the young clergyman settled down in the chill, damp place, to pass the weary hour as best he could.

Peter the Hermit was a person of whom he had heard, but one whom he had never seen. He was said to be an eccentric old man, half-crazy, who led the life of a recluse somewhere in the wild hills on the west of Deedham.

In about an hour and a half, though it seemed an age to the imprisoned man, there came a call from the top of the rocky walls.

"Hello, down there!"

"Hello!" Ruy responded.

"Be ye all right yet? I can't see anything but blackness down there."

"Yes, I'm all right, and have been anxiously awaiting your return. Have you brought the rope?"

"Yes, I have the rope with me," was the assurance, "an' now I'll try to git ye out of yer fix. I'm goin' ter make one end of it fast to a tree up here, an' then I'll let the other end down to you, an' if I can't pull ye up you'll have ter climb."

"I can easily climb out," Ruy hastened to assure, "if you make the rope secure at that end."

"Don't be afraid but I'll do that."

Silence followed, and presently there came a slight "shhh!" through the air, and the rope shot down.

But it did not come within reach of the prisoner. It was too far out, and its end hung down into the further depths of the shaft.

"Have ye got it?" the Hermit called out.

"No," Ruy informed; "it is too far out for me to reach it. Pull it up slowly," he directed, "and the end will swing in to me."

"All right."

The man at top did as he was told, and when the rope had been drawn up out of the lower depths its end swung in where the prisoner could reach it.

"Hold on!" Ruy then shouted; "I've got it."

"Good enough! Now make it fast under yer arms, well up, and climb."

The young clergyman followed the directions given, making sure that he was tying knots that would not slip in case of a fall and sudden strain, and when that was done he began to climb.

It was not easy work by any means, for the rope was a small one; but, by taking it by stages, with frequent stops to rest, winding the slack rope around his leg for support when he did so, the top was finally reached and the old recluse was there to help him over the edge of the shaft. The clergyman was saved!

As soon as he had cast off the rope, Ruy grasped the old man's hand warmly, saying:

"Sir, I owe my life to you."

"Don't mention it," the old man waived. "It was no more'n one human ought ter do fer another."

"Yes, I know, but it is more than some would do. There are some why pass by on the other side, before the good Samaritan comes. I must thank you, heartily, and I will see to it that you are also more substantially rewarded."

"I see you kin talk somethin' of the scriptures," the old hermit observed, paying no attention to the promise of reward, "and that is what I like— But, bless me, be you a parson?"

This exclamation came out as he took a closer look at Ruy's appearance and dress, though both were sadly disordered.

"Such is my calling," Ruy owned.

"An' how on airth did ye come ter git down there? I thought ye must be some drunken fellow who had come wanderin' around here an' tumbled in."

"Let us sit down right here in the warm sunshine," said Ruy, "and while I am getting warmed up I will tell you all about it. You have a right to know, since it is to you that I owe everything, but I must ask you to keep secret for a time what you are about to hear."

"I promise that. I believe you wouldn't ask anything that wouldn't be right for me to keep."

"I assure you faithfully that I would not."

"Go ahead, then, and I'll not repeat what I hear."

"I am in possession of a secret," the clergyman proceeded to explain, "and it is one which, were made it known, would ruin certain persons at Deedham, and perhaps send them to prison. These persons, I believe, have attempted to murder me. In fact, I am sure of what I charge. Last night a man came for me, in a carriage, and asked me to come with him to see his dying wife. He said he was from Westerford. Without a thought of suspicion I set out with him. On the way he picked up another man, who, he said, was a neighbor of his. When we came to the point where the old road to this mine leaves the turnpike, the carriage was turned into the old road. I questioned the man about it, and the pretended lame man presented a revolver at my head. Then followed a struggle, in which I was worsted, and I was brought here and cast into this awful hole."

"Ugh!" the old man exclaimed, with a shudder. "It's a wonder that ye wasn't all man-gled up. What be ye goin' ter do with th' fiends?"

"I have been thinking of that as I have been talking, and I have a plan in which I desire further help from you."

"And you shall have it. What kin I do for ye?"

"Is your cabin far from here?"

"It is better'n a mile."

"If you will take me there, and give me shelter for a day or two longer, just as I may require, I will disclose my plan as we walk along."

"An' that I'll be glad ter do. Come, an' we'll be right off."

They had been talking for about half an hour, and Ruy was thoroughly warm and comfortable, except that he was decidedly hungry; and they started away from the scene together, the old man carrying the rope which he had wound into a coil while they were in conversation.

CHAPTER XXX.

ADOPTING A DISGUISE.

THE clergyman soon found that the old man was, in his way, quite a character.

Peter Oakleaf was his name, but "Peter the Hermit" was the name he was generally known by.

He was a man about sixty years of age, apparently, and was clad in the plainest and least costly of clothes. His head and face were covered with a great mass of hair and beard, and he looked like the wildman that some thought him to be.

His wildness was all in his appearance, however, for he was quite the reverse, so far as disposition went. Nor was he insane, though he had allowed one idea to gain too strong a hold upon him. Once he had been well-to-do, but conceiving the idea that a man could not serve God and at the same time attend to worldly matters, he had given away everything and had retired to the woods with a Bible for his companion.

By the time they had arrived at the hermit's cabin, the clergyman had made his plans known, and old Peter promised him his hearty support.

Ruy's plan was this: He would allow the men who had attempted his life to believe that they had succeeded in carrying out their nefarious scheme, and for the time being he would remain mysteriously absent from home. His absence would soon make a great excitement, and in the midst of it he, in disguise, would do what he could to finish the task he had begun; that is, the task of solving the Barremore mystery.

The old recluse stirred around and soon made ready a breakfast for his protegee, and as Ruy ate he imagined that he had never tasted anything half so good, for he was as hungry as the oft-mentioned hungry bear.

When that was over they fell to talking about theological matters, and the young clergyman was enabled to enlighten the hermit upon a great many points that had proved too much for his understanding.

Noon came, and after preparing another meal, to which the hermit himself did full justice, the hermit set out to go to the town.

As soon as he was gone, Ruy threw himself upon the floor and slept, and did not awake until the old man returned and knocked loudly at the door.

By that time it was late in the afternoon, and the sun was not more than an hour high.

"What success?" the clergyman asked.

"Good success," was the response. "I have got everything you wanted. You will not know yourself when you get fitted out in such a rig as I have brought ye."

"So much the better, then. If am unable to recognize myself, it is not likely that any one else will be able to recognize me."

"True enough. But, here: I'll proceed to unload an' show ye what I've got in my bundles."

One by one the several bundles and packages were opened, and when the contents of all were revealed, the young clergyman voiced his approval.

"My old friend," he said, "you have done as well as I could have done myself, and perhaps better."

"And here's yer change," the hermit concluded, taking some money from his pocket.

"No, that is yours," Ruy corrected. "Keep it; I give it to you."

There was some argument over this, which was finally set right by the old man's agreeing to keep half of the money.

Fortunately the young clergyman had had quite a sum of money in his pocket on leaving the house on the previous night, and so was enabled to make the purchases necessary for the carrying out of his scheme.

The purchases consisted of a cheap, rough-looking suit of clothes, a broad-brimmed common felt hat, a pair of rough boots, and a false beard of a sandy-brown color. Besides these things, there was a good revolver and a box of cartridges to fit its chambers.

Having reached the decision he had, the young clergyman meant to turn detective in earnest. Now that his life had been attempted, he knew that there was danger in the air for him, and that unless he took active measures immediately the lives of others might be sacrificed.

Without any delay or hesitation he laid aside his own proper attire and put on the disguise.

It was a wonderful transformation. Now he looked to be a genuine backwoods mountaineer.

"How do I look?" he asked.

"Your own father would not know you, Dominic," the hermit assured.

There was a fragment of broken looking-glass in the cabin, and with the aid of that, and the help of the old man, the false beard was put on and adjusted so that nothing of the clergyman's whiskers could be seen, and then securely fastened.

The other clothes, when Ruy had taken his money and other things out of the pockets, were folded in a bundle, wrapped up and laid aside.

By this time the sun was about going down.

"Well, now, I am ready," Ruy observed, as he loaded the revolver and put it in his hip pocket, "and if I look as little like a detective as I feel, the chances are altogether against me."

"You look like anything but a Dominie, anyhow," the hermit assured, "and you have every reason to believe that you'll succeed in th' undertakin'. Your life wasn't spared last night fer nothin'."

"So I believe myself, honest friend. At any rate I am determined to right a wrong that has been done, if it is in my power to do it."

"An' may ye succeed!"

"Thank you; and now if you will kindly point out the way to the city, I will set out before it gets dark."

"I intend ter go down with ye, sir. We'll have somethin' ter eat first, an' then I'll accompany ye to where ye can't mistake th' way."

The old man insisted upon this, so Ruy agreed and after the meal they set out toward Deedham.

It was about two hours after dark when the Dominie Detective, having parted with his friend and guide, entered the lighted streets.

He walked along boldly, no one paying any attention to him, and made his way to the home of Dr. Lairdshaw.

He rung the office bell, and nothing was thought of it when the doctor's mother, who answered the call, found a stranger at the door.

"Is the doctor in?" he asked.

"Yes, but he is up-stairs," was the answer. "He is not well to-day. Do you want to see him?"

"Yes, and I must see him," the seeming countryman assured.

"Well, step in and I will call him."

Ruy went into the office and sat down, and in a little time Dr. Lairdshaw entered the room.

He was more pale than ever, and looked to be ill indeed. Ruy saw at a glance that he could hope for but little active help from him.

"You want to see me?" Mervyn asked.

"Yes, and strictly in private," Ruy answered.

"You are strictly in private in this office, sir," the doctor assured. "You may speak freely."

"Very well, and I will begin by asking you if you know who I am?"

"Why, no, of course not," the doctor answered. "I never saw you before in my life. Who are you?"

"One moment first. Do you know Ruy Rodman, the clergyman?"

"Yes, and he has strangely disappeared," Mervyn hastened to say. "Do you know anything about him?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Where is he?"

"Right here before you. I am he!"

The doctor looked at his caller as though he believed that he was mad. As he now looked closely, however, he could make out the features, the little that could be seen of them, as strangely like the young clergyman's.

"Are you really Ruy Rodman?" he asked.

"I am he and no one else, really," was the response, "but in this disguise you see before you Simon Green, farmer."

"Well, take off that hat and beard, and let me see for myself."

"I will do so, for I can feel that the beard is working loose, and I want you to put it on for me so that it will stay."

As he said this he removed the hat and false beard, and the face of Ruy Rodman was seen.

The doctor could hardly believe the evidence of his own eyes.

"Where have you been?" he asked, "and what means this strange outfit?"

The clergyman told his story concisely, the doctor listening with bated breath to every word.

"That was a narrow escape," he remarked, as Ruy concluded.

"But, you said that it is announced that I have mysteriously disappeared," Ruy reminded. "What is said in connection with that?"

"Why, it is the talk of the town to-night. Some time during the day your old housekeeper reported to the police, and by this time they and your congregation are looking for you everywhere."

"I am sorry, but it will have to remain a mystery for a few hours or days it may be."

"It will be another sensation for the papers to-morrow."

"It cannot be helped. I hope to be able to give them a greater one ere long. I am going into this thing now with my whole heart."

"What are your plans?"

"I have told you."

"Yes, but I mean how do you intend to start in? What is to be your first move in the game?"

"I believe I will go and tackle that man Wooster again."

"Ha! that reminds me. Young Westervall wants to see you in the worst kind of way."

"What for?"

"Something in connection with that man."

"I must go and see him immediately."

"And I will go with you. You might not gain admittance were you to go alone, for I assure you that your appearance is not prepossessing."

They both laughed, and when the doctor had put on the false beard for the clergyman, so that it could not work loose again, they left the house together, and set out for the home of the Westervalls.

CHAPTER XXXI.

PROMISES AND CONFESSION.

WHEN they arrived at their destination the doctor asked for Mrs. Westervall.

They were admitted, and that lady soon entered the room into which they had been shown.

Dr. Lairdshaw briefly explained the situation. Mrs. Westervall was even more astonished than he had been.

"Can it be possible that you are indeed Mr. Rodman?" she questioned.

"Doctor Lairdshaw has already assured you that I am he," Ruy spoke.

"It is wonderful. But, you say you desire to see Stedman."

"Yes."

"I will call him. He came in only a little while ago, and is in his room, I think."

She went out, and in a brief time returned with not only the young man, but his sister as well.

Both looked at the disguised clergyman as though it were impossible for them to believe what their mother had told them.

The commonplace remarks were soon exchanged, and the matters of deeper interest were brought up. Ruy Rodman had to repeat his story, and as soon as he had done so he turned to Stedman Westervall, with the remark:

"Doctor Lairdshaw informs me that you have been looking for me, and that you have something of importance to say to me."

"Yes, so I have," was the response. "I have a letter that will be of the utmost importance to you."

"Let me see it."

"First allow me to tell you how it came into my possession."

"Very well, do so, if that has anything to do with the importance you attach to it."

"It has all to do with it. This afternoon I was at the post-office, when I saw Herold Keenan come in. I stepped back where he did not see me, and saw him go to the general-delivery window and get a letter. As soon as he received it he opened and read it."

"I was watching him, and I could detect a look of satisfaction on his face as he read. As soon as he had finished reading the letter he went out of the office, tearing the letter into small pieces as he went, and as he stepped out at the door he threw the pieces to the wind."

"I followed out right after him, and seeing a bootblack standing near, I called the boy to me and told him that I would give him a quarter if he would gather up all the fragments of that letter and hand them to me. He agreed, and I stepped back into the office and waited.

"The little fellow soon came in with them in his hand, and assuring me that he had gathered them all, I paid him and put the pieces in my pocket. I came right home and went to my room, and for the next two hours was busy in trying to put the letter together so that I could read it. And at last I succeeded.

"Under any other circumstances I know that you would all despise me for such a deed, but in this case I felt no compunction whatever about it. When I had matched the pieces so that the letter could be read, this is what I saw."

With this he handed the disguised clergyman a copy of the letter, and Ruy, asking permission to do so, read it aloud.

It was as follows:

"NEW YORK, the 21th.

"DEER SIR:—

"I have done what you paid me to do, and have found that it was as I said it must be. I went to the Saugbone Med. Col. and seen the fellers what I sold the stiff to that night, an' they assured me that they had carved it all up next day in the latest approved stile and manner. So you see I was right, and that is the end of it all. Don't let any one find out where I be fur the present, but if you should want ter see me yourself you can find me at the —Hotel, down on — street, near the East River. —Yores truly, ASHER WOOSTER."

Just as the disguised clergyman finished reading, Mervyn Lairdswal was heard to utter a groan, and to the surprise of all he slid from his chair to the floor in a deathlike faint.

Too late, then, Ruy realized the mistake he had made. Dr. Lairdswal was the very last person to whom such a revelation should have been made.

The mistake was done, however, and there was no mending the matter then.

Dropping the letter, Ruy sprang to the fainted man's side, Stedman doing the same, and together they lifted him and laid him on a lounge.

That done, every effort was made to restore him to consciousness.

Finally his eyes opened, and gradually he came to.

"What has happened?" he asked.

"You are weak, and fainted, that is all," Ruy explained.

"Have I been in a faint? That is strange for me, and— But, now I remember. Now I—"

He could say no more, but covering his face with his hands began to weep, sobbing as only a man does when his heart gives way under a trial heavier than he can bear.

It was a solemn moment, and it was doubly sad for the young clergyman, who knew the doctor's secret.

The faces of the others were pale and drawn with emotion, for they all understood the terrible import of the letter they had heard read.

For some minutes no one spoke. The doctor was the first to do so.

"This is more than I can bear," he declared.

"You must not give way," encouraged Miss Westervall; "it may not prove true, after all."

"It is only too true," Mervyn moaned. "Nor do you know the worst of it," he added. "Oh! this will drive me mad, mad!"

As he uttered the words he sprang up and began to pace the floor in an almost frenzied manner.

"What can he mean?" whispered Guenver.

"I cannot guess," responded her mother.

"Doctor Lairdswal," spoke the disguised clergyman, "shall I take you home? It will be better for you."

"Yes, yes, for I must have air," the doctor cried. "I—I am choking, I am choking to death!"

The two ladies and Stedman Westervall looked on in amazement, but only the clergyman knew fully the awful situation. Greatly did he blame himself for his utter thoughtlessness in reading that letter aloud, and he feared that the doctor might be tempted to commit suicide.

Can the doctor's awful position be fully realized? He it was who had been the cause of Huldah Barremore's being buried alive, and he was responsible for her death. Then upon that was the appalling truth that her body had been sold to college students for dissecting purposes.

The wonder is that his reason did not give way at once.

The young clergyman made apology for them both, and having requested that the utmost secrecy be observed, led the doctor away.

"I—I cannot bear this," Mervyn groaned, as soon as they were out upon the street. "I shall be a raving maniac. I can see but one way to end it all, and that is to—"

"And that is what?" questioned the clergyman, in tones of fear, as though he knew well the thought that was in Mervyn's mind.

"To take my life," was the answer. "I can do it easily, it will be painless, and then—"

"And then your naked soul will stand, self-sent, before the Maker who gave it being," the clergyman solemnly interrupted.

Mervyn shuddered.

"Would you rob me of that last hope of oblivion?" he asked.

"I would rob you of any such idea as that. Your spirit, your thinking part, will never know oblivion, in the sense you mean. In another sense I hope that it may. You must not take a step so rash."

"But, what am I to do?" Mervyn moaned.

"Anything rather than that. You must bear up, for we may yet discover that this letter has no connection with that case. It may be so. We must have proofs."

"No, no, there is no hope now. It is only too true."

"Well, you must promise me one thing."

"What is that?"

"That you will not take a step so rash as suicide. I demand this of you. I can have no heart to go on with the task I have undertaken, unless you do promise."

"I promise—yes, I promise that, for you must not give up. You must not draw back now. I can do nothing, and everything depends on you."

"That is your solemn promise?"

"It is."

"Very good, I believe you. I will push forward with what I have begun, and I will stop at nothing to learn the truth. If Herold Keenan is guilty of what we believe him to be guilty, he must be stopped and exposed."

"And he shall feel the weight of the law, too," Mervyn cried; "or if the law cannot reach him, then personal vengeance can. He shall never live to—"

"Stop!" the clergyman ordered, in an imperative tone. "You have no right to exercise a personal vengeance, friend Mervyn. There is One who has said Vengeance is Mine. You must not be rash in that direction either. We must do nothing without the proof positive. We may be mistaken, after all, and it may be the real Huldah who is Keenan's wife. We must be doubly sure before we act."

"No, there is no mistake. It is only too true as we suspect. There is now no hope, no hope."

Do what he would, Ruy could not rouse him from his morbid state.

And he could but acknowledge to himself that the doctor's conclusion was the only one that could be deduced from the evidence presented.

There was, first, the statement of the man Burke. Then there was the evident guilt of the man Wooster. Upon that was this letter from Wooster to Keenan. There did not seem to be any chance for doubt in regard to the fate the buried girl had met.

But the proof must be had. He would go to New York, he would visit the college named, he would hunt up Wooster and force the full truth from him. No action against Herold Keenan could be taken until the fate of that girl's body could be brought to light with proof that could not be doubted.

The two talked on, and by the time they reached the doctor's home he was in a slightly better frame of mind.

After once more exacting the promise that he would do nothing rash, the disguised clergyman left him.

As soon as he was alone the doctor sunk down upon his office chair, and there he sat, silent and thoughtful until far into the night.

He did not rouse up until his mother entering the room softly, laid her loving hand upon his shoulder and spoke his name. She looked worn and pale with her constant strain of anxiety concerning him. He took her hand, drew her down to a chair at his side, and then and there told her all. The morning sun found them still there.

CHAPTER XXXII.

HERMIT PETER ARRESTED.

NEXT day the little city of Deedham was convulsed with excitement.

The papers came out with a lengthy article about the mysteriously missing clergyman.

There must be a woman in the case, of course. No good theory could be advanced by a news paper without hinting, at least, at that. But in this case the woman did not appear. She could not be named.

Beyond that the theories were vague, indeed. Murder was hinted at, but no satisfactory motive could be suggested.

The parsonage was besieged, of course, but nothing could be discovered that could throw any light upon the mystery.

The housekeeper was required to tell over and over again the little she knew, but that was most unsatisfactory.

With the police there was none of this bustle and excitement, but they were at work trying to get some clew to the mystery. It was not an easy matter, however. The old housekeeper had not given them a good description of the old man with whom the young clergyman had gone away, and none whatever of the horse and carriage. The man's name she had heard, but had forgotten it. All she could state clearly was that he was from Westerford, and wanted the clergyman to go with him to see his dying wife.

The police detectives had visited Westerford, but were unable to learn anything whatever.

No trace of any vehicle upon which they could attach suspicion could they discover.

On the forenoon of this day, however, the police were given a clew upon which they began work immediately.

The keeper of a cheap and second-hand clothing store, or rather a sort of respectable junk-shop, where almost anything could be had, was the person who furnished it.

Having read the account of the disappearance in the papers, the recollection of something of the previous day came into the man's mind, and he lost no time in carrying the information to the police.

The story he told was true in every particular, too.

He called attention to the old recluse of the hills known as Peter the Hermit. He pointed out the fact that he did not frequently come to town, and that when he did he seldom had money to spend, 'most always trading off baskets of his own making for such necessities of life as he needed.

When this had been set forth, the man went on to state that on the previous afternoon the old hermit had come to his store with two bills of quite large denomination, and had made a purchase that was larger than he had probably ever made before in his life. He went on to tell what the purchases had consisted of, and as soon as he mentioned the revolver and the false beard, the police took hold of the clew with the greatest avidity.

Such purchases, they reasoned, meant a disguise for somebody, and if the old hermit were himself the murderer, it must be his intention to get away in disguise as soon as possible. Perhaps he had already disappeared. If not, if only a party to the crime, then it must be that he had made the purchases for the principal.

Be that as it might, the police detectives set out for his cabin.

They found the old hermit calmly reading his Bible, searching out some of its hidden mysteries with the new light that the young clergyman had given him.

He welcomed his visitors, not knowing who they were or what they wanted.

But they soon made their business known.

"We want to know what you know about the murder of Clergyman Rodman," one of the officers came out bluntly.

For a moment the old man was startled, and his confusion looked suspicious.

"I—I don't know anything about his murder," he declared. "I didn't know him, and hadn't heard that he's dead."

"Where did you get all the money you spent in town yesterday afternoon?" the other of the two officers demanded.

"I—er—that is somethin' that I can't tell."

The old hermit's confusion increased.

"You can't tell, eh? Well, we'll take a look around your cabin, anyhow, and perhaps we shall find something that will help us."

As he spoke, the detective rose and began the search, the other sitting guard over the suspected man.

Something of a suspicious nature was soon found.

Under the old hermit's bunk was discovered a bundle, which, on being opened, proved to contain clothes such as a clergyman generally wears. The clothes were black, and the coat was a frock that buttoned high at the neck. The garments had been damp, and were still so, and were much besmeared with clay and mud.

"Do these belong to you?" the discoverer demanded.

"No, they don't," the hermit owned.

"Then whose are they?"

"I cannot tell you that."

"And why can't you?"

"I cannot tell you that either."

Among other things discovered was a white shirt, on the lower end of the bosom of which were the letters "R. R."

The discoverer called his companion's attention to this.

"It is straight proof," his companion agreed.

"And we have got our man."

"Or at any rate one who knows something about the crime."

They snapped handcuffs upon the old man's wrists in a trice.

"You had better own up," they advised, "for if you don't it will be the worse for you in the long run."

The old man was badly frightened, but he meant to be true to his word to the young clergyman, so he would say nothing.

"How came these clothes here?" was demanded.

"I will not tell you."

The answer was right to the point.

"Then you must go with us to town and be put into jail."

"All right; I kin do that. I'll have ter do it, anyhow, I reckon, by th' looks o' things."

"We might let up on you if you will make a clean breast of it all."

"I have nothin' ter tell."

"Then you'll have to go with us."

"You'll give me time ter put things in order here, and f'sten th' place up, won't ye?"

"Yes, we'll do that."

The search was continued, till everything about the place had been explored, and then the old man was allowed to set his house in order and secure its doors and windows.

That done, the handcuffs were replaced on his wrists and he was led away a prisoner.

The suspicious clothes were taken along as proof.

Arriving at Deedham, the hermit was given a hearing, but as he positively refused to explain anything he was committed to jail.

The matter was no less mysterious than it had been.

It looked clear, now, that the clergyman had been murdered, for his housekeeper recognized the clothes as his, and showed another of his shirts which was marked in precisely the same manner as the one found.

What interest the old hermit had had in it, however, was not so clear, for he utterly refused to let out anything that would throw any light upon it.

The clergyman's housekeeper was taken to the jail to see if she would recognize him as the old man who had taken the clergyman away, and she stated positively that he was not the man.

Now the police were at loss what to do.

They felt that the key to the whole situation rested in the information that the old hermit would not give.

Had they been vested with the power to do so, it is not unlikely that they would have put the old man to torture to make him talk.

Some time after the arrest had been made, a veiled lady called at the Police Headquarters and asked to see the chief.

She was shown into his private office.

The door was closed, and then the lady threw up her veil.

It was the face of Guenver Westervall, somewhat pale but full of determination.

"I presume you do not know me, sir," she said.

"I believe I do not," was the response.

"My name is Guenver Westervall, and I am a daughter of Carleton Westervall, who was a clergyman in this city."

"Is it possible? Why, I knew your father well. What can I do for you? What is it that brings you here?"

"I have information for you. Before I give it, however, you must promise that you will not reveal who I am, nor give the information to the papers."

"This is a strange request, Miss Westervall."

"I know it is, but as soon as you hear what I have to tell, you will understand why I make it, and will see that it is quite reasonable."

"But if I promise what you ask, it will bind me so that I may not be able to make any use of the information you give me."

"I assure you that it will not."

"May I ask what this information is about?"

"It concerns the disappearance of Reverend Ruy Rodman."

"Is it possible? What can you know about that matter?"

"That is what I am prepared to tell you, upon the condition I have named."

"And I cannot grant it, Miss Westervall. In my position I cannot bind myself by promises."

The young lady looked perplexed for a moment, but she soon brightened up and said:

"Well, I must trust that you will grant what I wish when you have heard, and I will tell you what I know. In the first place, then, Mr. Rodman is not dead."

"Not dead?"

"Not dead. His life was attempted, but he escaped death, and old Hermit Peter rescued him from a perilous position. Mr. Rodman, now in disguise, is tracking down the rascals who attempted his life, and desires that it may be thought that he has been killed. The things old Peter bought yesterday were for him."

"How do you know this, Miss Westervall?"

"Mr. Rodman told me all about it last night at my home, where he called."

Further talk about the matter followed, and the chief promised that nothing of it should be made known. He said he would lend the young clergyman all the help he could if he would call on him. With these assurances the young lady went away, and so far as the police were concerned the Rodman mystery was allowed to rest for the time.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A DESPERATE DILEMMA FOR KEENAN.

IN the mean time Herold Keenan had not been idle.

On the same afternoon that he received the note from Asher Wooster, he went to New York.

Arriving there, he had two objects in view. One was to learn who the lady was who looked so much like his wife, and the other was to have an interview with Wooster.

He hardly knew how to proceed. He did not dare go to the home of Mrs. Blossom himself, and knew not whom to send.

What he wanted was to make some inquiries about Jeannette Bingham.

In his dilemma he thought of Asher as just the man he wanted for the work, and went to see him first.

Going to the hotel where he had been told to come, he found his man there.

Wooster was keeping very "shady," and had not been far away from the hotel since his arrival. He had not been at the college at all, although he declared that he had.

"What do ye want?" was his demand, the moment he saw Keenan.

"I have another piece of work for you," was the explanation.

"I don't know about any more jobs," Wooster hesitated.

"Why?"

"It strikes me that there's danger ahead."

"In what way?"

"I have been uneasy ever since I was questioned by that gospel-spouter."

"I don't think there is anything to fear," Keenan reassured. "There is certainly no danger in the work I want you to do now."

"Well, what is it?"

"I want you to go to a certain house and make inquiries about a certain young woman. She suddenly disappeared some months ago, and I would like to know if anything has been heard of her since."

"Who is she? Where's th' house? How much is there in it?"

Keenan told the man all that it was necessary he should know, and giving him particular directions how to proceed, sent him off, terms having been agreed upon.

It was arranged that they should meet there again at nine that night.

When Wooster was gone Keenan went out of the hotel in a very thoughtful manner.

Something about the man he had been led to mistrust, as he questioned him about the college and the students to whom he had sold the body. He had a doubt that he had been there at all.

This was a vital point in the game he was playing. He wanted to know what had been done with that body. He must know.

Finally he decided to go to the college himself.

Proceeding first to a place where he knew such things were furnished, and representing himself as a detective, he procured a suitable disguise.

When he appeared upon the street again, it was as a man of middle age with a full beard partly gray.

He went to the college at once.

Having got the name "Trimmerty" from Wooster, he asked for that person when he was admitted.

Some few questions were asked, and he was conducted up to that student's room, where, as soon as he knocked for admission, he was invited to enter.

It happened that Trimmerty and Buzbee were there together.

"What do you wish to see me for?" Trimmerty asked.

"I want to ask some questions about the body of a young woman that was bought by you young gentlemen on the night of June thirteenth."

The two students paled immediately. Who was this man?

"You need not be afraid to answer," Keenan reassured, "for no harm is going to come of it."

The students had glanced at each other, and Trimmerty spoke:

"No body was bought by any of us," he lied, "but there was a strange incident happened here on the next morning."

"What was that?"

"Before you are told, we must know something about you, who you are, why you are after this information, and so forth."

"Well, I will tell you something of that, but not all. I am in search of a body that was taken out of a grave on that night. I had some reason to suspect that it might have been brought here."

Again the two students looked at each other.

"Allow me to ask you a question," spoke up Buzbee.

"Certainly, go ahead," Keenan gave leave.

"Do you know anything about the mystery of Jeannette Bingham?"

"I never heard of such a person," Keenan declared, promptly.

"What kind of body was it that you are in search of?" asked Trimmerty; "was it old, or young? black, or white? male, or female?"

It took Keenan only a second to know how to respond.

"It was that of a man of sixty," he said.

The students looked relieved.

"It was not brought here," Trimmerty declared, "and we don't know anything about it. We are not allowed to buy bodies here anyhow."

"But, what about the incident that you said happened on that same date?" the caller reminded.

"It was on the following morning," Trimmerty corrected.

"No matter, what was it?"

"Well, as it is no secret, we do not mind

telling you, though I do not like the way in which you make your demands."

"Pardon me, I know that I spoke too roughly."

"Very well, it is done. The incident is this: On that Sunday morning a young woman was brought here by some person, and left here, the person mistaking this place for a hospital. The woman seemed to be ill and mentally deranged. We had her taken to a hospital immediately. There she was recognized as a young woman who had been missing from home for several days. Her name, it came out, was Jeannette Bingham. Her friends went to the hospital and identified her, and she was taken away next day. The peculiar part of it all is, that the young lady had lost her memory, and knew nothing whatever of her past life."

"Well, that was rather peculiar," Keenan confessed, but his thoughts were deeper. There was a vague—a horrible suspicion framing in his mind.

"Yes, it was peculiar indeed," echoed Buzbee.

"Do either of you know this young woman?" Keenan asked.

"I am slightly acquainted with her," Buzbee owned.

Keenan had recognized him as the young man he had seen at the theater in company with the mysterious young woman.

"I suppose there is no doubt about her identity, is there?" he questioned.

Once more the students favored him with a stare.

"You seem to be interested in this matter after all," Trimmerty remarked.

"I must own that I am," Keenan confessed.

"In what way are you interested?" asked Buzbee.

"I must ask another question before I explain anything."

"Well, what is it?"

"Has any one else been here to-day inquiring about this matter?"

"No, sir."

"Are you sure about that?"

"Certainly."

"Well, now, young gentlemen, let me tell you a little story," Keenan proposed. "On the night of June thirteenth, or the morning of the fourteenth, one Asher Wooster brought here the body of a young woman which he sold to you for twenty dollars. He has since informed me that you assured him that you dissected the body and disposed of it in the usual way. Now is this true?"

The two students knew not what to say to this. Who could this man be? was the question that came up again.

"It is altogether a mistake," declared Trimmerty.

"I think not," Keenan persisted. "Have you not been telling me a false story about that Jeannette Bingham?"

"I think we had better refer you to Doctor Rockabrown," spoke up Buzbee. "He can tell you all about that matter. You will find that we have given you the truth."

"You can tell me everything, if you will."

"But we will have nothing further to say about it," declared Trimmerty.

"Then for the present I will take my leave,"

Keenan responded to that. "You need not be surprised if you see me here again soon, though."

"We can tell you no more than we have."

"Perhaps not."

A few words more and Keenan went away. His brain was fairly in a whirl. He now guessed the truth, but could hardly make himself believe that it was true. Could such a thing be possible? He must know more about it.

The two students, too, were greatly excited over the matter again. It was plain to them that trouble was arising out of the affair, and they had no desire to figure in it.

"I believe I ought to have followed him," observed Buzbee, when it was too late to do so.

"It would have been just the right thing," agreed Trimmerty, "but you have thought of it too late."

They talked the affair over at length.

In the mean time Keenan was trying to think how he should proceed in order to get another look at Jeannette Bingham without arousing any suspicion against himself.

He had not reached any definite conclusion yet when he came to the store where he knew she had been formerly employed.

Here the idea came to him. It must be near the closing hour, and he would see if she was there to come out with the other employees.

With a glance at his watch he stopped and waited.

Knowing all that he knew of the matter, he felt that he was doing a foolish thing, for how could Jeannette be there and somewhere else at the same time? Still he waited.

Presently the employees began to leave, and in a little while, to his surprise, he saw Jeannette come out.

It was she, there could be no mistaking that; but, how could it be? If not she, then who? If not Jeannette, and it could not be; then it must be Huldah Barremore alive! The student at the college had lied to him, and so had Wooster.

The young woman walked rapidly away, and

he followed her. She went straight to the home of Mrs. Blossom, where Jeanette Bingham had lived. It was something that he could not reason out, but the truth of which had forced itself upon him. He was in a state of mind bordering upon the desperate. What was to be done? He was walking upon a mine that was likely to explode at any moment. Should this girl's memory suddenly return, what would be the result? He must take action at once.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A PIECE OF GOOD NEWS.

WHEN the Dominie Detective reached New York it was after nine.

He set out immediately for the hotel where he hoped to find Asher Wooster.

It was his intention first of all to seek another interview with him, and, if possible, to force from him more of the secret he held.

Failing to do that, he would visit the college that Wooster had named in his letter to Keenan, and there, he had no doubt, he would be able to learn something that would throw more light upon the matter.

Arriving at the hotel, he found that it was a hard-looking place, and that it was not in a very desirable neighborhood. Without any hesitation he went boldly into the bar-room and looked around.

His eyes soon fell upon the man he was in search of. Wooster was there, waiting for Keenan, according to their appointment.

The disguised clergyman did not let on that he recognized him, or that he was looking for any one in particular.

Advancing leisurely down the room, he took a seat at a table just behind the man he was after. He desired to study him a little before he spoke to him. Perhaps he might gain something by so doing.

No sooner was he seated than a waiter was at his elbow, asking what he would have.

It was one of the cheap places, where a seat for a moment must be paid for.

Ruy ordered a bottle of ginger ale, and when it was brought he proceeded to drink it very leisurely.

He had been there but a short time when another man came in and looked around very much like he had done.

As soon as the man's eyes rested upon Asher Wooster, however, he strode forward and took a seat at the same table.

Asher looked at him in surprise.

"Don't know me, eh?" the new-comer observed.

"Yes, I know ye now," was the answer, "but hang me if I did at first. What be ye togged out like this fer?"

"I have been playing detective a little."

"What have ye been doin'?"

"I have been discovering that you have lied to me, Asher Wooster," was the stern response.

The Dominie Detective could overhear all they said, although they spoke in low tones.

"Lied to ye?" Wooster exclaimed, his face taking on a dirty yellow hue.

"Yes, lied to me," Keenan insisted. "You have not been near the college to ask anything about that body."

"How do ye know that?" Wooster demanded.

"Because I have been there myself."

"Then they've lied ter you," Wooster cried with pretended anger.

"Perhaps they have, but I have a strong suspicion that they told me that much of the truth at least."

A waiter came just then to take Keenan's order, and Keenan ordered beer for both himself and Wooster.

When it had been brought they resumed their talk.

The disguised clergyman could still overhear.

"What did they tell ye at th' place?" Wooster demanded.

"They said nobody had been there at all," answered Keenan.

"Well, they lied, fer I was there, an' they gev me jest th' information that I passed along ter you in that letter I sent ye."

"It is very strange, then, that is all."

"What is very strange?"

"That they should tell me one story and you another."

"I don't see that it is. They knowed me, an' would tell me th' truth. They didn't know you, and it is likely they'd lie to ye."

There was something in this argument, as Keenan had to admit.

"Well," he said, "let it drop for the present. What did you learn about that young woman?"

"Jest as ye please," Wooster agreed. "I have learned about all there is ter be learned, I guess," he answered, "though I had ter be so keerful in my questions that I hadn't a big lattytodd ter swing in."

"Well, tell me what you did learn."

"When I wouldn't tell th' woman who I was ner who had sent me, she was keerful, but she told me that that th' girl had suddenly disappeared on a Thursday night, and that nothin' was heard of her till th' next Sunday, when somebody sent word that she was in a hospital. She went there, an' sure enough there th' gal

was, but she had lost her mind an' didn't know nothin' of th' past, an' don't yet."

"And is that all?"

"That is ther sum an' substance of it."

"Did she speak as though there was any doubt about the girl's being the lost Jeanette?"

"Nary a once. She said that she went to th' hospital herself and identified her as soon as she heard she was there."

"Very good. Now let us go back to the other matter. You have assured me that those students dissected that body and disposed of it."

"And so they did; leastways they said so, anyhow."

"Well, they didn't."

"How do you know that?"

"Because before they could do so that dead girl came to life!"

Wooster half sprang to his feet, but settled down again in order not to draw attention, and ejaculated:

"Ther deuce ye say!"

The young clergyman, too, was thrilled with what he heard. Was it possible that the true Huldah Barremore lived? To him, knowing what he did, this was less unreasonable than it was to the others.

"It is true, just as I tell you," Keenan assured.

"I can't understand it."

"Neither can I, but it is the fact, as I fully believe. I have seen the young woman, and it is the same one."

Ruy Rodman could hardly curb his impatience to learn more.

"Well, then, it's lucky that I didn't bury th' body somewhere else, as you wanted me to," Wooster observed.

The clergyman had been trying to make out who Keenan was. In the disguise he still had on it was not easy to recognize him. Now he satisfied himself that his suspicion that it was Herold Keenan was correct.

"No," Keenan disclaimed, "it is not lucky at all. If you had buried her, that would have settled it for once and all."

"What be ye hintin' at?" Wooster demanded.

"I am hinting at nothing," was the answer.

"If you had followed my directions, as I told you to do, nothing could have come of this, and you would have been perfectly safe, instead of hiding as you are."

"Mebby you'd like ter make it safe yet?" Wooster suggested.

"See here," and Keenan leaned over the table and spoke in a lower tone, "are you a man to be trusted, Wooster?"

Ruy Rodman had to strain every nerve to hear, but his hearing was acute and he did hear.

"You orter know that," was the response.

"I always thought you were, but I have had to mistrust you in this thing."

"Well, I can't help that. If I was lied to, an' you was too, whose fault is it?"

"Well, let that pass. Would you undertake to help me in a certain big piece of work for—say a thousand dollars?"

"I'll do anything for that money," Wooster declared.

"Good enough. I'll give you that sum if you will help me, and will swear to hold your tongue ever afterward."

"I'll do it."

"Very good again. Now that girl came to life after she was dead, has lost her memory, and I want to make sure that it don't return to her. You see?"

"I guess I do."

"That Jeannette Bingham must disappear again, and must never be found."

"Exactly."

"And will you help me in such a work as that?"

"For the money named, yes."

"It is a bargain, then. But, come; this isn't hardly the place to talk over such business. If you've got a room here we'll go up to that."

"Come right on, then, for I've got one."

They got up from the table, and Wooster led the way from the room.

The Dominie Detective knew not what move to make now. One point of information that would have been of the greatest value to him was wanting. He had not learned the address of the Jeannette he had heard them mention.

He desired to go to the medical college, but he reflected that, while he was wasting time there, perhaps, the rascals might carry out their evil designs against the young woman.

It was not easy for him to decide what to do. It seemed clear that he had heard all that he was likely hear, and that upon the information he had he must act, or not at all.

After due consideration he decided to watch for the two men to leave the hotel, and follow them.

Going out, he took up his station on the opposite side of the street, at a place where he had full view of the entrance.

He had to wait about an hour before his game appeared.

Both men came out, but they stood on the hotel porch, and presently they shook hands and parted. Wooster went back into the house, while Keenan went off up the street.

The clergyman followed him.

Keenan went straight ahead for some distance. Presently he took a car in another direction, the Dominie Detective making haste to take the same car. In that direction they went a mile or more, and when Keenan finally alighted he entered a shop, or store.

Ruy got off the car and waited for him to come out again. In about fifteen minutes he reappeared, and this time it was in his proper person as Herold Keenan. He again took a car, and this time Ruy followed him to the ferry, and across, and saw him take a train for Deedham. Then the Dominie Detective returned to New York and took lodging at the hotel where Asher Wooster was staying.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A FAIR EXCHANGE OF CONFIDENCES.

NEXT morning the clergyman's first care was to see that he was thoroughly disguised before leaving his room.

When he had had breakfast he lounged around the bar-room and dining-room for some time, hoping that Wooster would go out somewhere, so that he might follow him and learn something more, but Wooster did not seem to have any intention of going away from the house at all.

Waiting around till it was after ten o'clock, Ruy resolved that he would go and pay a visit to the medical college.

But his disguise, was it a suitable one for such an errand? He thought not. But how was he to change it?

He thought of the place where Herold Keenan had changed his.

There he went, and entered the shop as though perfectly at home there.

"Vell, v'at you vant?" asked the proprietor, who was a Jew.

"I want another disguise, as soon as you can fit me out," Ruy answered.

"Oohl von disguise, is it? You vas a bolice, maype? Vell, v'at kint disguise you like to had, eh?"

"Can you make a well-dressed, respectable-looking clergyman of me?"

"Yah, I kin do dat; but maype it cost some-tings."

"I am willing to pay."

"Ver' vell, step into de next room, please."

Ruy followed him in, and when he had removed his big hat and false beard, the old Jew exclaimed:

"Yah, yah! I makes yust a poss Dominie mit you!"

"All right," said Ruy, smiling; "go ahead and do it."

Half an hour later he stepped forth from the old Jew's shop once more in his proper character. His only disguise was a pair of eye-glasses.

He went on to the medical college.

Arriving there and asking for the superintendent, or the chief instructor, or whoever was at the head of the institution, he was shown into the office of Dr. Rockabrown.

Ruy had made up his mind that he would put the case in its strongest light at the first. He would leave little room for equivocation, if possible.

"I am here upon a little matter of important business," he announced, when the common-places of greeting had been exchanged.

"Well, sir, what can we do for you?" the doctor asked.

"In the early hours of the morning of June fourteenth," Ruy proceeded to explain, "the body of a young woman was brought here and sold to some students. Later on that young woman came back to life, and she was removed to a hospital. I desire to know where that young woman lives. I must see her."

The doctor's face was serious, but he remained calm.

"How did you learn all this?" he asked.

"No matter how," Ruy answered. "I am playing a detective role in the behalf of some friends, with the hope of righting a wrong that has been done. If you will give me this point of information you will help me greatly."

"Are you a clergyman, or are you only attired as such?"

"I just now changed my clothes for this attire," Ruy answered truthfully.

"Well," said the doctor, "I do not admit that what you have hinted at is at all true. There was a little incident happened here on that date, however, which I do not mind telling you about."

"I shall be glad to hear it."

Dr. Rockabrown went ahead, then, and told about the matter in about the same words the student Buzbee had employed in telling of it to Keenan.

"But, where is her home?" Ruy persisted when had done.

"I have the address here in my desk, and will give it to you. Now I would like to hear what you know about the matter, and what the wrong is of which you have spoken."

"I am not prepared to give any information yet," Ruy answered. "When the matter has been straightened out you will hear all about it."

"Well, just as you wish. But, that address,

I cannot find it. I'll tell you what, though. One of our students knows the young lady, and where she lives; I'll call him."

"Yes, please do so."

Dr. Rockabrown went from the room for a few minutes, and when he returned the student Buzbee was with him.

"You want to know where Jeannette Bingham lives," Buzbee observed.

"Yes, that is what has brought me here," was Ruy's answer.

"Well, I can show you the house, but I am not sure about the number."

This was not true, for he knew the number well. He wanted a chance to ask the stranger some questions. Two persons in one day making the same inquiries, meant something.

"And will you do it?" Ruy asked.

"Yes," was the answer, "I will."

"Then let us set out at once."

"Hold on a moment," said the doctor, "I desire to know more about this case. Do you know anything about the past of the young woman?"

"You mean Jeannette Bingham?" Ruy interrogated; "I know nothing whatever about her past."

"Whom would I mean, if not her?"

"True enough. But, I must go. You will know all about it in good time, doctor."

"You have not told me your name."

"You shall know it next time we meet."

Ruy was now at the door, and he stepped out and hastened away, Buzbee with him, and they left the doctor in a rather angry frame of mind.

The doctor felt that he had been beaten a point or two at his own game, and did not like it.

As the clergyman and Buzbee went away, the latter asked:

"May I ask you one question, sir, in regard to this matter?"

"You may, sir," Ruy granted.

"Very well, it is this: Have you any reason to believe that this young woman is not the person we believe her to be?"

"I will answer that question frankly," Ruy returned. "I have good reason for believing that this young woman whom you suppose to be Jeannette Bingham, is another person altogether."

"I thought so."

"Pray explain."

"I have known Jeannette Bingham for some time. The more I see of the lady who now holds her place in life, the more I am inclined to think that she cannot be Jeannette. Especially do I hold this view since one night a short time ago, when, at a theater, I saw another young woman who looks enough like this one to be her twin sister. That one seemed to recognize me for an instant, and I felt that she was the true Jeannette."

"Was any one with her?" Ruy asked.

"Yes, there was a man with her."

"Describe him."

Buzbee did so, giving as faithful a picture as he could.

"It was he!" Ruy exclaimed. "It was the rascal I am after. The woman you saw was the true Jeannette, undoubtedly, while this other is a young lady whom I am very anxious to find."

"See here, sir," cried Buzbee, "I believe that if we can bring ourselves to trust each other, and tell what we can to each other, it will result in good all around. Are you willing to take me into your confidence?"

"Yes, if you are willing, on your part to take me into yours."

"Well, I am."

"I will test you."

"Do so."

"When this girl was brought to the college, in what manner was she brought? Was she brought there by a stranger who mistook the place for a hospital, as the doctor has told me? or was she brought there as a corpse and sold to a student?"

"She was brought there a supposed corpse," Buzbee truthfully replied.

"I knew it! Now we may proceed and exchange confidences, I am sure."

"I believe that we may."

And they did. Buzbee, on his part, told all he could about the matter, and told faithfully all that he knew about Jeannette Bingham. Then the clergyman gave him an outline of the case from his standpoint.

The result was that Buzbee took hold of it with a decided interest, and promised to do all in his power to straighten the tangle out.

When they arrived at Mrs. Blossom's house, the student introduced Ruy, and they made their business fully known to that lady, telling her all that was necessary about the case, and stating their suspicion.

Mrs. Blossom listened in the greatest amazement.

"This is a great revelation to me," she said; "but it is no more than I ought to have looked for. For some time past I have had a shadow of the same suspicion myself. Jeannette had ways that this lady does not show at all, and which could hardly have been so utterly forgotten; and this lady has some traits that never be-

longed to Jeanette. Still, I dared not allow myself to believe the suspicion, for how could I doubt that this was Jeannette?"

A long talk followed, in which a plan of procedure was laid out.

It was arranged that the young lady should be told nothing, and that for a day or two she should continue her duties at the store.

In the mean time Ruy would return to Deedham and prepare for her reception there, and when all was ready he would return for her, and Mrs. Blossom should accompany her to that place and witness the outcome of it all.

Ruy warned Mrs. Blossom of the danger that threatened the young lady, and she promised that, under one pretext or another, she would accompany her to and from the store, and would otherwise protect her. She would warn her, too, so that she could be on guard herself.

When all had been arranged, Ruy and Buzbee took their leave, and soon after they in turn parted.

Buzbee returned to the college, where he could not resist the temptation to take Trimmerty into his confidence; and Ruy went back to the old Jew's shop and made another change of attire, taking on the one he had discarded there.

That done, he found a telegraph office, and sent this message to Dr. Lairdshaw, at Deedham:

"DR. LAIRDSEW:—

"I will see you to-night. Have the best of good news for you. Be of good cheer."

"SIMON GREEN."

It was his assumed name he signed, which he knew the doctor would immediately recognize.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A PRETTY SCHEME BALKED.

It was nine o'clock when "Simon Green" rung the bell of Dr. Lairdshaw's office.

The doctor was in, and he opened the door immediately.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, after a second glance at his caller, "it is you, is it? I am more than glad to see you. I have been wild with impatience ever since I received your telegram. What have you discovered?"

"Huliah Barremore lives," the disguised clergyman informed.

"God be praised!" cried the doctor, fervently.

"But," he immediately questioned, "is it true? Is there not some mistake?"

"I do not see any room for mistake," Ruy declared.

Dr. Lairdshaw could hardly contain himself. Tears of joy filled his eyes, and he looked like a new man.

"I must call my mother," he declared; "she knows all, for I have told her. I had to do it; I could not hold it longer from her. She will be overjoyed, too."

Stepping from the office he went in search of his mother, and soon returned with her.

Making known who his caller was, he told her the good news Ruy had brought.

"Oh! it is too good to be true!" Mrs. Lairdshaw cried. "Is it true?" turning quickly to Ruy.

"It is," he assured.

"But, come," cried Mervyn, "tell us all about it. Sit down, mother, and we shall hear the good news in full."

"Pardon me if I offer an amendment to that," said Ruy. "Had we not better go over to Mrs. Westervall's, where we can all be together, we who are in the secret, and where the matter can be immediately considered?"

"Yes, you are right," agreed Mrs. Lairdshaw. "That is what we had better do, Mervyn."

"Very well, I agree with you, since you are both against me," said Mervyn.

So it was arranged, and they set out immediately.

Arriving at their destination, they were eagerly welcomed, and when the news positive was made known it was greeted with gladness.

Without loss of time, then, the Dominie Detective told his story, which was listened to with breathless attention.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Mrs. Westervall; and similar exclamations were heard from all.

"Poor, dear Huliah!" said Guenver; "I must go to her at once."

"Pardon me," objected Ruy, "but I cannot permit you to do that. I have not told you where to find her, and—"

"But you will tell me, will you not? You will not keep me from her?"

"It is better so. She would not know you, unless sight of you happened to bring the past all back to her mind with a rush, and that is not desirable."

"It certainly is not," agreed Mrs. Westervall. "You must curb your impatience and wait, Guenver."

"I suppose I must, but it is not easy."

"Well, what is to be done?" questioned Mrs. Lairdshaw.

"We must lay out our course here and now," said Ruy, "and follow it to the end. This question must be settled. Now, what do you suggest?"

"You are our leader in the matter," reminded

Mervyn. "It is for you to lay out the course to be taken."

"Well, if you all desire it—"

"Yes, you are the one to direct," interrupted Mrs. Westervall. "Let us hear what you can suggest."

"Very well, if you will put it all upon me, I suppose I must do as you desire. I have already arranged with the Mrs. Blossom I have mentioned, that the young lady is to be brought here. The question is, what is to be done with her when we have brought her here? Now, I would suggest that she be brought here to your house, Mrs. Westervall, and allowed to remain here until the question has been settled."

"Yes, do that by all means," cried Guenver.

"There is no other place where she can be cared for so well," agreed Mrs. Westervall, "unless it be at your home, Mrs. Lairdshaw," she added; "and it would be hardly the thing to take her there."

"I agree with you," was the response.

"Then that is settled," decided Mrs. Westervall, "she is to be brought here to my house."

"And that settled," said Ruy, "it is not necessary to discuss anything else until she is here."

This was acknowledged, but the discussion did not end there. The whole matter was gone over in every detail, as far as possible, and discussed from every point of view.

Ruy, too, asked questions about his disappearance, and was pained when he learned that the old hermit had been arrested on suspicion, but was glad to know of the action taken by Miss Westervall.

The hour was late when the little company broke up, but late as it was the clergyman detective and Dr. Lairdshaw set out for New York.

Next morning Ruy took him to the shop of the old Jew, where a suitable disguise was adopted, and about ten o'clock they appeared at Mrs. Blossom's.

Mervyn's reason for taking on a disguise was that Huliah might not recognize him.

They had a carriage, and were ready to take Mrs. Blossom and the young lady immediately to Deedham.

Mrs. Blossom welcomed them, as soon as Ruy had made himself known, and in half an hour was ready for the journey.

Jeannette, she said, was at the store, and she had accompanied her there on the pretext of having an errand in that direction.

Leaving the house in charge of her one servant, Mrs. Blossom entered the carriage and the three were driven rapidly to the store.

In the mean time danger was threatening Jeannette.

She was at work in the office, when a message was brought in to her, in which she was informed that Mrs. Blossom was very ill and desired to see her immediately. A carriage was waiting, the note ended.

She could not understand why a carriage should have been sent, but did not stop long to question the matter. Making her excuse to the cashier, she put on her hat and wrap and hurried out.

It seemed to be providential, almost, for just as she came out of the store the carriage containing her friends drew up to the curb.

"Why, there is Jeannette, now," Mrs. Blossom suddenly cried. "See, she is speaking to that man, and is going toward that carriage. Where can she be going?"

"Ha! we are in the nick of time!" cried the Dominie Detective; "that man is the Asher Wooster I have spoken of. Quick, Mrs. Blossom, you must stop her! She would not know either of us two."

He threw open the door and sprung out, and helped Mrs. Blossom out quickly.

Jeannette was just on the point of entering the other carriage.

"Jeannette, stop!" the woman cried; "where are you going?"

The girl paused and looked in the direction of the voice, and seeing who it was, a cry of surprise escaped her.

The face of Asher Wooster was like a thunder-cloud, and he made an effort to force the girl on into the vehicle, but it was now too late. The sight of Mrs. Blossom in perfect health exposed the lie to the girl, and she held back with all her strength, and soon broke away.

Immediately she ran to Mrs. Blossom, and with a muttered curse Asher Wooster sprung into his carriage, and was driven rapidly away from the scene.

"Where were you going?" the woman asked again.

"Why, a note was brought to me that you were very ill, and desired to see me immediately," the girl explained.

"It was a trap to lead you into danger," Mrs. Blossom declared. "You should have been suspicious, after the warning I gave you."

"Yes, I see it now, and I am very grateful for my timely deliverance. But, where are you going?"

"I was just coming for you to accompany me into the country upon a little business errand. It will be a delightful drive, and will do you wonders of good."

"But, how can I go?"

"Suppose you had entered that carriage, your absence from the store might have been forever I guess you can be spared for the rest of the day. Come, get right in."

"But, these men," the girl questioned, "who are they?"

"Friends of mine," was the explanation.

It did not take long to induce the girl to enter the carriage, and the driver having already received his instructions, drove at once to the ferry and crossed.

In a little time, then, the vehicle was rolling away into the pleasant country, in the direction of Deedham.

When about half-way to that place the driver stopped at a wayside inn to water his horses, and Dr. Lairdshaw got down from the box where he had been riding and went into the house to get some water for the two ladies.

It had been arranged that in this way a drug should be given to the girl that would cause her to sleep, so that her first recognition of things at Deedham would be when she awoke in Mrs. Westervall's house.

He came to the door of the carriage with a picher and glass in hand, and pouring out a little of the water, asked if any one would drink.

Jeannette declined, at first, but upon the doctor's insisting that she was missing a chance to taste of the very best water in the world, she took the glass and drank what had been poured out.

"Ugh," she shivered, "I do not like it! If that is the very best water in the world, sir," she remarked, "I would not care to taste the worst. Why it is both salty and bitter."

"There must have been something in the glass, then," the doctor declared, "for the water is not bitter. Here," after rinsing out the glass well, "try it again, for I know the water is good."

The girl did so, and handed back the glass saying:

"Oh! it is good, indeed; I wonder what can have been in the glass?"

Mrs. Blossom, too, took some of the water, and by that time the driver had attended to his horses and the carriage went on its way.

It had not proceeded far, however, when the young lady began to show signs of drowsiness, and she soon rested her head against Mrs. Blossom's shoulder and slept.

When the carriage reached Deedham it was driven straight to Mrs. Westervall's, and the unconscious young lady was taken out and carried into the house, after which the driver was paid and the carriage dismissed.

The woman took charge of the sleeping girl, and she was undressed and put into bed. That this was the true Huldah Barremore, no one doubted.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

COMING TO A HEAD.

WHEN sufficient time had elapsed for the effect of the drug to be deadened, Dr. Lairdshaw directed that the young lady should be awakened.

He had laid aside his disguise, but not so the clergyman. For his there was further use.

Mrs. Lairdshaw, Mrs. Westervall, and Guenver were in the room, and as soon as the doctor's permission was had, they proceeded to make noise purposely to bring about the effect desired.

In a little time Huldah (now to give her her true name) awoke, and it was with surprise that she looked around.

"Why, where am I?" she presently asked, in the greatest wonderment. "Can it be that I am at your house, Guenver?" turning to her.

"Why have I been brought here?"

"You were brought here at my request," Guenver replied. "You have been ill. How do you feel?"

"Why, I feel perfectly well. But, what a long sleep I must have taken! Why, I have had the most extraordinary dream, and it is as fresh in my mind as though it had really happened."

"What have you been dreaming about?" asked Mrs. Westervall.

Huldah gave an outline of her experience as Jeannette Bingham.

It was with the greatest joy and satisfaction that Dr. Lairdshaw, standing just outside the door, realized that the girl he loved had been thus miraculously restored, and that she was in her right mind.

Stepping into the room, he asked:

"Well, and how is our patient to-day?"

"She is very much better," answered Guenver.

"She has returned to consciousness at last."

"That is good indeed. Now she will soon be well."

"Why, have I been unconscious?" Huldah asked, in great amazement; "I thought I had been asleep."

"It might be called a sleep," responded the doctor.

"And how long has it lasted?" she asked.

"You have been in that state for over three months," was the truthful reply.

The girl's eyes opened wide with wonder. It

was something that she could not bring herself to believe.

Mrs. Blossom had kept out of sight, of course, as it would be necessary for her to do so until, by degrees, the whole truth had been made known to Huldah.

Huldah felt so well that she insisted upon getting up, and the doctor giving his permission she was allowed to do so, Guenver supplying her with some of her own clothing.

Up to this time she had not asked for her father, but she did so now. Her mind seemed to grasp the past slowly. One thing after another came to her, and her questions soon became unceasing.

Finally, all save Guenver left the room, and as soon as they were alone together Huldah asked concerning Herold Keenan. Had Guenver seen him?

"Why, he is married," Guenver declared.

"Married!"

The exclamation came out sharp and quick, and Huldah's face blanched.

"Yes, married," Guenver confirmed.

"Whom did he marry?"

This had all been arranged for, and Guenver answered:

"He married a Miss Jeannette Bingham, of New York."

Huldah sprang to her feet, greatly excited.

"Why, that is the very name that I thought was mine in my dream," she cried. "What does it mean? Is it really true what you tell me?"

"It is really true."

The unhappy girl sunk down with a sigh.

Gradually, little by little, as Huldah could grasp it, the truth was let out, except the part Dr. Lairdshaw had played, which was not known to Guenver; and when she had heard all, Huldah sat like one turned to stone.

It was some time before she made any attempt to speak.

When she did it was to exclaim:

"Heavens! can this be true?"

"It is all strictly true," Guenver assured.

"And it is true that Herold Keenan married another woman on the very night of the day of my funeral?"

"It is."

"Oh! the horrors that I must have passed through!" the girl cried, covering her face with her hands. "It seems impossible—it must be a mistake."

But, the truth was forced home, and finally it was all accepted, and Huldah Barremore's love for Herold Keenan faded away, leaving in its stead a feeling of the greatest loathing.

The spell was broken, and she could see him as he really was.

Being perfectly well, and now in her right mind, Huldah entered into the business of proving her identity, and of regaining her rightful place.

Of course Mrs. Blossom had now been allowed to see her, thus attesting beyond doubt the truth of the weird story Huldah had been told.

All this had taken time, and it was not until in the evening that the final consultation was held.

At this all who were in the secret, including Huldah herself, were present, and the matter was discussed freely and fully.

It was decided that action must be taken immediately. The man Wooster would be likely to make known at once the failure of his plan to abduct the supposed Jeannette, and her disappearance would put Herold Keenan upon his guard. Whatever was to be done, had to be done quickly.

When the company broke up, it was with the understanding that Huldah was to keep carefully out of sight, and that the mystery concerning the missing clergyman was not to be made known.

Ruy and Mervyn left the house together, and went immediately to the house of a justice of the peace, where warrants were procured for the arrest of the parties concerned.

That official was a surprised man, but he had to comply with the request made, and the warrants were given.

Armed with them, the young man next sought out the chief of police and took him into their confidence.

The final cards in the game were about to be played.

The chief complimented the clergyman highly upon his work, and gave him some advice about what yet remained to be done.

His advice was to the effect that it would be well to force Wooster to turn State's evidence, if possible. He further offered the assistance of his men, if wanted.

After consulting upon this point, Ruy and Mervyn concluded that it would be well to have an experienced officer with them, so a detective was sent along to lend assistance where needed.

The three set out at once for New York.

Arriving there, their destination was the hotel where Asher Wooster was stopping, and there they took lodging.

They were up early next morning, and were on the alert for their man, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing him enter the dining-room for his breakfast.

Acting upon the advice of their detective assistant, they did not make the arrest then, but waited. They had every reason to believe that Herold Keenan would be on hand before the day was over.

And they were not mistaken. About ten o'clock Keenan came into the bar-room, and seeing Wooster, crossed over to where he sat and took a chair at the same table.

When he was seated, then Ruy Rodman, Dr. Lairdshaw, and the officer, all stepped forward together, and laying hands upon them, said:

"You are our prisoners!"

"What means this?" demanded Herold, sharply, though his face had turned a sickly pale hue.

"It means just what the words imply," informed Ruy Rodman, sternly. "Officer, handcuff them."

The two men sprang back as though they would resist, but the nifty clergyman whipped out his revolver and covered them.

"Resist at your peril!" he cried.

The cowards quailed, and the police detective soon had the "bracelets" upon their wrists.

"Have you anything here that you want to take with you?" Ruy asked of Wooster, as soon as they had been secured. "You are going to the county jail at Deedham."

"Yes, I have some things in my room," was the answer. "If you'll let me go an' git them—"

"Never mind that part of it; we'll send for them."

This was done, and so soon as Wooster's valise had been brought, the prisoners were led out and taken to the nearest station-house, where for the time being they were left, with the Deedham officer to guard them.

Ruy and Mervyn then set out to secure witnesses from the medical college and the hospital, and when their story was fully told they found no trouble in getting them.

The return to Deedham was made by carriage, after dark, so that the arrest might be kept secret, and the rascals were quietly lodged in jail.

Next morning preparations were begun for the grand *denouement*.

At an early hour Dr. Lairdshaw called upon Mr. Barremore, alone, and told him the story fully, holding back nothing save his own desperate work in the matter; the act that had almost made him guilty of taking a life.

Mr. Barremore was at first inclined to think that Mervyn had gone mad, but the truth was gradually forced home, and little by little Mr. Barremore's eyes were opened.

"Now I can see it all," he finally cried. "The many little things that went to make up the whole in my darling Huldah's character, are entirely wanting in this other person, but I have been blinded by the report of her sickness when away, and have laid everything to her loss of memory. How blind I have been!"

"Yes, but how could you have believed otherwise? Come with me, now, and you shall see your daughter, alive and well, and then you will see fully the desperate game that has been played for the purpose of winning your fortune."

Mr. Barremore went with him to the home of Mrs. Westervall, and the meeting between father and daughter was an affecting sight.

Having now let the father into the truth, the rest progressed easily, and the early afternoon was the time set for the final act to be played.

Mr. Barremore went himself to induce old Margaret Keenan to come to his house, telling her that something of importance must be made known, in which she had an interest; and when he had got the old lady's curiosity fully aroused, she promised readily enough that she would be on hand.

A hint was given to some reporters, too, that if they wanted to witness the final act of the Barremore drama, they had better not let a certain occasion pass by unattended.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

WRONG MADE RIGHT.

AT one o'clock in the afternoon a mixed company was assembled in the parlors of the Barremore residence.

First of all was Mr. Barremore, slightly nervous, but earnest and full of dignity. Then may be mentioned old Margaret Keenan and her aged maid.

Besides these there were Huldah Barremore—the true Huldah, Dr. Lairdshaw, Ruy Rodman, Mrs. Westervall and Guenver, Mrs. Lairdshaw, Anastasia Budd, Mrs. Blossom, students Buzbee and Trimmerty, and Dr. Rockabrown, from the college; Drs. Rippley and Woodcroft, of Deedham; Stedman Westervall, and Mike Burke, the converted rascal.

These were in the front parlor, and the doors between that room and the rear one were closed.

In the rear parlor quite another company was gathered.

There were Herold Keenan and his wife, Asher Wooster, Bolsters, the janitor at the medical college, and his wife, detectives, reporters, and others.

When the company in the front room had all settled down, and the time for action had come, Mr. Barremore motioned to a servant to throw open the connecting-doors between the two rooms.

This was immediately done, and the guilty faces of Herold Keenan and his no less guilty wife were seen.

It had been so arranged that Huldah Barremore had been seated near the door on one side, and Jeannette Bingham just as near on the other side; and when it was opened the two girls were seen side by side, almost, and their wonderful resemblance to each other could be noted.

It was, indeed, remarkable, for the two girls looked almost exactly alike.

Ruy Rodman, in his proper person, rose to make an address, and as he did so a profound silence fell over all.

Old Margaret Keenan was perfectly silent, for she could do nothing but stare in profound amazement at the two young women, wondering what it meant, and who the one who was not Huldah could be.

The young clergyman began and went over the case in its entirety. He recalled the matter point by point, explaining each clearly and fully, and offering proof for everything. His rich voice and easy manner of talking were highly pleasing, and he was listened to with rapt attention.

He showed that Huldah Barremore had been ill, that she had been attended by Dr. Lairdshaw, who had had in consultation Drs. Rippley and Woodcroft; and that finally, after a brief illness, she had died—as was supposed. Then he made mention of her funeral, giving the date and time, and all the little points that went to make the whole as it is known to the reader. That done, he went over the events of that Saturday night, dwelling particularly upon the shower and the time at which it was in progress, and of the couple who had come to him in the storm to be married. Then followed the other events of that memorable night.

From that he went to the conversion of the man Mike Burke, and told all about the confession he had made. According to his story, the body of Huldah Barremore was not taken from the grave until after the storm had passed over, and this, if true, was proof sufficient that it was not Huldah Barremore that Herold Keenan had wed. And that it was true was immediately proven by the evidence of Mike Burke and Asher Wooster.

Then followed the confession of Asher Wooster, which was supported by the evidence of the college students and Dr. Rockabrown. The body was traced then to the hospital, and Mrs. Blossom told how she had gone there and identified it as that of the missing Jeannette Bingham.

Herold Keenan's villainy was then fully shown up. He had loved Huldah for her money only, and it was for that, and for the fortune that he expected to inherit from his great aunt, that he had been so anxious to marry her. As soon as he heard of her death he resolved upon a bold scheme. In New York was a young woman whom he knew, and with whom he had been playing the lover. This person was Jeannette Bingham, who looked enough like Huldah to be her twin sister. It was this striking resemblance that had led to his acquaintance with her. He would bring Jeannette to Deedham, knowing well that the girl would be willing to risk it for the prospect of wealth, and boldly marry her as Huldah Barremore. On the same night he would have Huldah's body taken from the grave and buried elsewhere, so that when the marriage was made known, and the grave was examined, no body would be found there. He would immediately take Jeannette away for some weeks, until he could train her well in the part she would have to play, and then they would boldly return and the imposition would be set up.

And so it was carried out, fearlessly. On the Thursday on which Huldah died, Keenan went to New York to prepare his plot. That night he rung the bell at Mrs. Blossom's house, and when Jeannette came to the door he asked her to step out for a moment. She accompanied him, and he rapidly laid his scheme before her. She listened to it all, and immediately decided that she would take part in it. In order to do this, and at the same time hide her own identity forever, it was decided that she should not return again to her home, but should remain forever simply "missing." Keenan found lodging for her, and preparations were begun for the further carrying out of the bold game.

On the night of the day of the funeral, Keenan came from New York to Deedham and brought Jeannette Bingham with him. Arriving at Deedham, they set out on foot for the residence of the clergyman who had preached the funeral sermon of Huldah Barremore that afternoon, determined to make their game the boldest, but desirous of keeping out of sight as much as possible. The storm came upon them suddenly, and by the time they reached their destination they were wet through. They were married, and made man and wife legally, although one had used an assumed name.

Immediately after the marriage they returned to New York, and on the next day Herold came to see his great-aunt, and told her of his success. The lie he told her was a good one, for it was possible that he could administer a drug, as he had said, thus producing an appearance of death

in the young lady; but that he had not had opportunity for such a thing, was well set forth by the evidence of Dr. Lairdshaw, the servants, and others.

In order to have time to post Jeannette thoroughly in the part she had to play, Herold took his bride on a voyage across the ocean. Finding that she was not likely to prove equal to the task, he set up the further lies about a sickness of fever, and subsequent loss of memory. And to this he owed the ultimate success of his nefarious scheme.

As Herold Keenan listened, his face took on a determined look, as though he still meant to contest the point, and when the clergyman ended he sprang up and cried:

"This is all a mess of lies, Mr. Barremore—Aunt Margaret! all a mess of lies! I demand proof for everything. Mr. Barremore, which of these is your child?"

As he said this he laid his hand lovingly upon the shoulder of his wife, and pointed scornfully at Huldah.

This demand had been prepared for on the part of Mr. Barremore.

Taking a card photograph from his pocket, he said:

"That one is my child who can tell me whose likeness this is."

It was a fair test, for Huldah had not been apprised of it, and he held the photograph up so that both might see.

Huldah remained silent, waiting for the false claimant to speak first.

"Come, young woman," Mr. Barremore cried, speaking to Jeannette, "if you are my daughter you will recognize this at once."

"You seem to forget that her memory is sadly wanting," Keenan quickly reminded, hoping to worry through the tight place.

"Well, let us see about your memory, then," said Mr. Barremore, turning to Huldah. "Whose likeness is this?"

"It is my dead Aunt Kate, your sister," Huldah answered promptly.

"Right! and you are my child."

Further points were brought out, and the mystery was fully cleared up and the desperate scheme laid bare.

The guilty ones had nothing left to stand on.

Nor was that all. Ruy Rodman had obtained information as to who the two men were who had tried to murder him by throwing him into the old mine, and it was shown that they were Harold Keenan and an accomplice whom he had brought from New York, and who had since been arrested.

Denial was useless, for proof was brought to support every charge that was made, and every loophole was closed.

When the expose was complete, and there was silence, old Margaret Keenan rose and tottered forward a few steps toward Herold, and shaking her long, bony finger at him, shrilly cried:

"Ah! you coward, you! You disgrace the name you bear! It is in this way that you hoped to cheat me, is it? My curse rest upon ye! The fond hope I had of seeing the Keenans and the Barremores blood equals, through you, is gone forever. Before another hour my will shall be made over anew, and not a penny shall you receive of all that I possess. Never darken my doors again. Come, Nora," to her maid, "we will go at once, so we will," and together the two old women left the house.

"And I can speak almost as bitterly of you," cried Mrs. Blossom, standing up and pointing at Jeannette. "I brought you up, educated you, did all that an own mother could or would have done for you, and see how you have repaid me! I never want to see you again. Go, and be as dead to me, your best friend, as though you had been successful in carrying out this terrible scheme."

"She need not trouble herself to go yet," spoke up Mr. Barremore; "these men have something to say first."

He gave a signal to the officers.

The officers arose and read their warrants, and the prisoners were taken from the room, Jeannette being one of them.

The hour that followed baffles description, almost.

It was a happy reunion, marred only by the presence of the reporters, who were bound not to leave unless actually turned out of the house, nor did they.

It required a broad hint from Mr. Barremore to get rid of them.

Dr. Lairdshaw was a new man, and his lost health and spirits seemed to be returning in a single hour.

No mention had been made of the desperate scheme he had undertaken, and which Herold Keenan had so closely followed in his own bold and fearless lie to account for the possibility of Huldah's return to life.

That was a secret that remained a secret with the three who shared it, unless, in after years, Mervyn himself shared it with a fourth person.

It was midnight before the happy company broke up.

As the hour was so late, Ruy Rodman and his housekeeper accompanied Mrs. Westervall and her daughter home, after which Anastasia Budd had the immense satisfaction of taking the lost

clergyman—the Dominie Detective—back to his home, his flock, and his proper station in life. Dr. Lairdshaw, meantime, had gone home in company with his mother and Mrs. Blossom, who was to be their guest for the night.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

REWARDS AND RETRIBUTIONS.

NEVER in all the history of Deedham had there been a sensation like unto that which was created by the newspapers on the following morning.

The whole little city seemed on the point of going wild over it. Everything else was neglected, for a time, and the case was discussed everywhere. The name of Rev. Ruy Rodman was on every tongue.

The reports in the papers were correct, in the main, and the case afforded reading that it did not seem possible could belong under the head of truth and actual occurrence. It seemed more to belong to the realm of fiction. But truth it was, and as such it had to be taken or let alone.

The case came to trial, and the proofs were overwhelming.

Communication had been had with the authorities in Ireland, at the place at which Herold Keenan and his wife had stayed while abroad, and it was shown that Mrs. Keenan had been in the best of health all the time the pair were there.

Many other points, too, all of which need not be set forth in detail, were brought out as clear, and the whole structure of lies was leveled to the ground.

Herold Keenan and his wife both were sentenced to State's Prison.

Asher Wooster was let off with a lighter sentence than he deserved, owing to the fact that he had helped to establish the case against Keenan. But, light as it was, comparatively, it was heavy enough.

All the others who had taken part on the side of evil, were similarly dealt with. Favor was shown to none.

All in due time there was a wedding at the Barremore residence.

The contracting parties were Huldah, and Dr. Mervyn Lairdshaw, the man who had risked so much and suffered so much.

Huldah's eyes having been opened, she could now see Herold Keenan in his true light, and Mervyn Lairdshaw in his.

Need it be said that it was a grand occasion? Need it be told what persons in particular were there?

All that needs be said is that they were a handsome couple, and that they deserved all the happiness that came to them. Mervyn had regained his health, all his old practice had come back to him, and the world was bright before him.

And all in due time, again, there was another wedding.

This time it was that of Rev. Ruy Rodman to Miss Guenver Westervall. Here was a surprise for everybody, especially for the young clergyman's congregation. No one had any suspicion that he had matrimonial intentions until the announcement was made with all the effect of a thunderbolt out of a clear sky.

The notoriety of the Barremore affair had given the young clergyman such an advertising that the whole city flocked to hear him, and in a few months he had a call to one of the richest churches in the city; which, however, he did not accept. The result was that his own church was built up, in a short time to a most prosperous position.

But Ruy Rodman was not after earthly fame. He was a true "fisher for the souls of men," and his charming wife was in every sense his companion.

The old hermit of the hills was promptly released from jail when the case against him was brought to naught, and he found a better home and a more agreeable one than his mountain cabin, in the household of the ex-detective clergyman. He was given a place as assistant sexton, and ended his days in happiness and peace as the fortunate husband of such a spiritual leader as Anastasia Budd.

Stedman Westervall was true to his resolve, and in a short time was an authorized *Verbi Dei Minister*—"Preacher of the word," while Abner Sharpin fell under the influence of Ruy Rodman, finally, and shared the fate of Mike Burke. Both these men stuck to their good resolutions for life. Mrs. Blossom had an own daughter, who had been away from home some time, and on the return of that daughter Andrew Buzbee made the acquaintance of one who soon became his wife. His fellow students, Trimmerty, Kingwood, Robertsboy, and the rest, gave him a rousing "send-off." And so, with no more to say that the imagination cannot readily supply, we take our leave of them all, with a parting glance at the happy vision of old Clement Barremore, with a pet grandchild on each knee, singing away his happy hours; and of Mr. and Mrs. Rodman, and their happy children, making a most charming picture of domestic peace and joy.

THE END.

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